



**COMMISSION
AGENDA MEMORANDUM**

Item No. 8j

ACTION ITEM

Date of Meeting February 11, 2025

DATE: January 20, 2025

TO: Stephen P. Metruck, Executive Director

FROM: Tygh Hollinger, Homeland Security Division (HSD) Sergeant

SUBJECT: Authorization for Conveyance of Retired Port-Owned K9 Copper to Handler

Amount of this request: \$0.00

Total estimated project cost: \$0.00

ACTION REQUESTED

Request Commission authorization for the Executive Director to convey Port-owned K9 Copper to his handler, Officer Eric DeVries.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Port Policy AC-13 restricts Port-owned property from being conveyed to Port employees unless approved by the Commission. AC-13 paragraph .05 specifically states that: "Port property must NOT be sold/transferred to any Port Commissioner or Port employee or to members of their immediate families, unless specific approval of the Port Commission is obtained." On November 21, 2023, the Port of Seattle Commission adopted Resolution No. 3816 which authorized the Executive Director to sell and convey port personal property in 2024 in accordance with RCW 53.08.090 with a value not greater than \$22,000.

We are seeking authorization for Officer DeVries' K9, Copper, to be retired from active duty as an explosive detection canine. We are asking that K9 Copper be conveyed to Officer DeVries. When a canine is being retired, organizations, including the TSA, offer the first right of refusal to the current handler. If that handler declines, the K9 is offered to the previous handler. K9 Copper did not have a previous handler. Officer DeVries was his one and only handler. Typically, if the handler does not want to adopt the K9 it is returned to the vendor or adopted to friends or co-workers. This is an established process with the Port and the Commission has authorized this three times before.

Retirement eligibility of a K9 is determined by several factors which can include but is not limited to age, health, medical cost, ability to achieve or maintain certification, and/or behavior. Supporting documentation may include a letter from a veterinarian, official department request, handler and/or trainer memos, and/or a hold-harmless agreement.

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JUSTIFICATION

K9 Copper was purchased by the Port in March 2024. Officer DeVries' previous K9, Ticket, was unexpectedly lost to cancer the previous year. Copper was purchased for \$3,500.00. Copper did not have any explosive detection training, but did have some obedience and hunting training.

K9 Copper's explosive detection training started following a brief acclimation period. His training comprised of explosive odor imprinting, search patterning, and obedience. All training was conducted with the ultimate goal of meeting the Washington State Explosive Detection Canine certification.

Unfortunately, early in K9 Copper's training there were observed deficiencies. His performance declined in new settings or in settings he hadn't been in for a while. His motivation to search for explosives also declined in these settings, as his hunting drive seemed to take over. He displayed inconsistencies in daily training. K9 Copper was more motivated to hunt than sniff for explosive odor.

This behavior was not only observed by Officer DeVries, but the department's two K9 trainers who provide training to the K9 team. Different training techniques and motivational tools were tried but were unsuccessful. K9 Copper's training continued until September when Officer DeVries sought the help of an outside K9 evaluator. The outside evaluator was a State certified evaluator and trainer with the Washington State Police Canine Association. K9 Copper failed the evaluation on the first day. However, the evaluator allowed Officer DeVries and K9 Copper to continue through the evaluation in the hope of gaining valuable training and to further evaluate K9 Copper's deficiencies. The evaluator's opinion was that K9 Copper was not suited to be an explosive detection K9 and that no amount of additional training would get K9 Copper to a level that Officer DeVries or the other trainers would be confident in his abilities.

K9 Copper's training took place from March to October of 2024. State certification requires 200 hours of training before they can be eligible to certify. Officer DeVries and K9 Copper had significantly more training hours than the required amount. Following the September certification attempt, Officer DeVries and the department trainers approached the K9 team's supervisors with their concerns. It was decided to forward those concerns to HSD leadership with a recommendation that K9 Copper be retired due to him being unsuited for explosive detection. A handler must have full confidence in their K9's ability to detect explosive odor in any setting. K9 Copper's inconsistencies in new settings means he could not be relied upon when responding as a regional asset or in unfamiliar areas of the Port.

Officer DeVries, the K9 trainers, and the outside evaluator lack the confidence needed to rely on K9 Copper. He has failed to meet the stringent requirements of an explosive detection K9 and has demonstrated he is not able to progress. Sadly, K9 Copper is unfit to continue in the role of explosive detection K9. Assigning Copper to another handler does not change his ability to detect explosive odor. Assigning him to another handler would only delay that handler from becoming certified and operational. Additional training from the trainers will not change K9 Copper's

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disposition for detecting explosive odor. It would only mean valuable training time and resources were prevented from serving the other certified K9 teams. Not retiring Copper also means the department will be responsible for any associated costs of care, such as food, veterinary services, and insurance.

Officer DeVries has built a relationship with K9 Copper. K9 Copper has known Officer DeVries and his family for almost a year now and recognizes Officer DeVries' residence as his home. Officer DeVries has agreed to adopt K9 Copper and has completed the Retired Service Animal Hold-Harmless Agreement.

Schedule

Upon approval of authorization by the Commission, the retirement of K9 Copper will be effective February 11, 2025.

ALTERNATIVES AND IMPLICATIONS CONSIDERED

Alternative 1 – Reassignment of K9 Copper to another handler.

Cost Implications: Unknown total cost associated with care and training time.

Pros: Reassignment of K9 Copper means there is a chance his disposition for explosive detection could change, and he could become certified.

Cons: The likelihood of K9 Copper's disposition changing and obtaining certification is extremely unlikely. A considerable amount of training time and resources would have to be diverted from the other K9 teams to focus on K9 Copper. The trainer's time is valuable and available resources are limited. This could result in other K9 teams not getting their required training and losing their certification. The department would incur the associated costs of keeping K9 Copper in training which is still highly unlikely to result in his certification.

This is not the recommended alternative.

Alternative 2 – Retire and release all interest in K9 Copper and allow for Officer DeVries to adopt him.

Cost Implications: \$0

Pros: The Port will not be liable for any cost associated with K9 Copper. K9 Copper will be adopted by Officer DeVries who would assume all costs associated with his care and provide a healthy, safe home for him.

Cons: None

This is the recommended alternative.

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FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The department is not requesting any funds for this authorization.

ATTACHMENTS TO THIS REQUEST

None

PREVIOUS COMMISSION ACTIONS OR BRIEFINGS

October 8, 2024 – The Commission authorized retirement and conveyance of Port-owned K9 Rocky to the handler.

July 26, 2022 – The Commission authorized retirement and conveyance of Port-owned K9 Merlin to the handler.

January 4, 2022 – The Commission authorized retirement and conveyance of Port-owned K9 Ty to the handler.