

Yolo County sheriff decides against MRAP armored vehicle

By Jim Smith, Daily Democrat

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Yolo County Sheriff Ed Prieto has decided — “after extensive research and analysis, dialogue with the community and taking into consideration multiple individual’s expressed concerns” — against accepting a free, surplus armored vehicle.

Known as an MRAP — a mine resistant ambush protected vehicle — the idea had drawn protests from county residents fearful it was leading to the militarization of the Sheriff’s Office.

On Monday, Prieto issued a statement that he would rejected the offer.

“The intent of accepting the surplus equipment was to provide protection to the community and law enforcement officers in high risk emergency operations such as active shooters, bomb threats, hostage rescues and other high risk situations,” according to the statement by Lt. Louis Pires. “Community members voiced concerns that the vehicle would be used during protests.”

However, Prieto has been previously adamant that this vehicle “would not have been deployed during protests.”

Woodland has its own MRAP-style vehicle, although the Sheriff’s Department version would have been smaller.

To purchase a similar vehicle would cost taxpayers well over \$200,000, according to Pires.

“Having this vehicle in the Sheriff’s fleet would have reduced response times to incidents in the unincorporated areas of Yolo County and when requested to assist the cities,” Pires noted. “ Now, the Sheriff’s Office will continue to rely on Woodland and West Sacramento Police Departments MRAP vehicles in times of need, which will undoubtedly increase response times.”

“The Sheriff recognizes that a vital component to the relations between the community and our officers is trust,” Pires stated. “The concerns of many community members, which were demonstrated at the Board of Supervisor’s meeting in February, were heard, measured, understood and carefully evaluated.”

While Prieto empathizes and agrees with some of these concerns expressed, ultimately, taking into careful consideration the backdrop of the current national political climate and the fear of police militarization, he also believes community confidence and trust are more important than the acquisition of an MRAP vehicle.

“The Sheriff and his department remain committed to community policing, building trust and transparency and to that end, will continue to make decisions based upon what will best serve the community of Yolo County,” according to the statement from Pires.

On Feb. 21 dozens of residents — some with picket signs in hand — urged Yolo supervisors against adding an MRAP to the Sheriff Department’s inventory, stating that it would militarize law enforcement, breed fear and break trust.

This situation is a familiar one for Davis and Woodland residents. Both cities were presented with an opportunity to obtain an MRAP in recent years through a Department of Defense program.

While public outcry against bringing the vehicle to Davis spurred city officials to reject and return it, their loss was Woodland's gain. The same MRAP was later accepted by the Woodland police, with a majority of the council backing the decision despite more opposition from residents. That was in 2014, but the same issues brought up then are apparently still relevant today, perhaps more so.

Throughout the discussions, Prieto had been firm in saying it would not be used for crowd control during protests, or in raids by federal immigration officials.

His sole consideration was in protecting the safety of his deputies and the community. Had it been obtained, the vehicle would have been used for emergency hostage situations, shootings and other high-priority, or dangerous incidents and events.

"One of the biggest criticisms of officers receive after the fact is that it takes them too long to respond," he said. With a vehicle specifically for the Sheriff's Office, there would be a quicker response time for such emergencies.

After hearing from Prieto and the public, supervisors were split and decided to bring it back for consideration on Tuesday, April 25. That will no longer happen, following Prieto's decision on Monday.