

4.45 Comfort Dog (Teams)



COMFORT DOG (TEAMS)

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ISSUING AUTHORITY: 			
Chief Nathan C. Hagglund			

PURPOSE:

To establish guidelines for the proper utilization, training, and care of Police Department Comfort Dogs.

A. The primary goal of the Comfort Dog Program is to improve officer well-being by having the animals provide comfort to reduce the stress and anxiety of our employees. Comfort Dogs will regularly interact with all employees to provide emotional support and serve as one element of the Department's officer wellness initiative.

B. First Responders, victims, and witnesses endure and experience various types of traumatic events. Many of these events can have a negative impact on individuals over time. Comfort Dogs can serve a vital role in assisting First Responders and citizens to help reduce the long-term effects of trauma.

C. A Comfort Dog will never be trained in aggression tactics or used as any level of force. Comfort Dogs will be selected based on their temperament to provide relief so they will be effective Comfort Dogs and successfully pass the required training. There is no need for the dogs to have any training before being selected by the Department.

D. Each Comfort Dog will be managed by a sworn member, referred to as a Comfort Dog Handler, who will be responsible for the dog to, include basic care and maintenance.

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E. Any employee or entity deemed appropriate by the Police Chief or designee may request the presence of the Department's Comfort Dog(s). The Comfort Dog may also attend public and community events to increase awareness of the Department's employee and community wellness efforts. Comfort Dogs will be utilized in a manner that complements the mission of the West Brookfield Police Department.

F. The Comfort Dog will only travel outside the Town of West Brookfield in an official capacity with supervisor approval.

ASSIGNMENT AS A COMFORT DOG HANDLER 41.1.5 (C)

A. All Comfort Dog Handlers will be selected and approved by the Chiefs of Police.

B. A Comfort Dog Handler may be removed from the program at any time at the discretion of the Police Chief or designee. The responsibilities associated with the role of Comfort Dog Handler will be completed in addition to the employee's normal duties.

C. An employee's position may be a factor in determining if their assignment is conducive to an employee becoming a Comfort Dog Handler.

D. An employee cannot be selected to serve as a Comfort Dog Handler unless they have a residence conducive to housing the dog.

COMFORT DOG TASKS 41.1.5 (A)

The types of situations where the Comfort Dog may provide comfort services include, but are not limited to:

A. First Responders who have witnessed or experienced a traumatic event.

B. Traumatized persons.

C. Witnesses/victims of crimes.

D. Groups of individuals who have been evacuated or were involved in a critical incident

E. Community Events to build community trust, build relationships, and provide knowledge.

F. Other Similar situations where it is appropriate to use a comfort dog.

COMFORT DOG HANDLER-SPECIFIC TASKS

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- A.** The Comfort Dog Handler assigned to a Comfort Dog shall be responsible for the care, training, and feeding of the Comfort Dog.
- B.** The Comfort Dog will reside with the Comfort Dog Handler inside their residence. The Handler will be provided a dog crate for the dog to sleep or rest.
- C.** While on duty, the Comfort Dog shall accompany the Comfort Dog Handler during their regularly scheduled shifts unless the dog is not fit to be utilized as a Comfort Dog.
- D.** The Comfort Dog Handler shall be the expert regarding the assigned Comfort Dog's abilities, training, and temperament and ultimately decide whether it is safe to use the Comfort Dog in any situation.
- E.** The Comfort Dog Handler shall provide the Comfort Dog frequent breaks and water and ensure the needs and safety of the Comfort Dog are met. This will enable the animal to maintain a calm demeanor while ensuring the dog's needs are met.

- F.** At all times, including off-duty hours, the Comfort Dog shall be the responsibility of the Comfort Dog Handler.
- G.** Comfort Dog Handlers shall attend all required training during regular working hours when possible. When training is during off-duty hours, the Comfort Dog Handler will work with their supervisor to get approval and adjust scheduled work hours as necessary.
- H.** Comfort Dog Handlers will not bring their assigned Comfort Dog to any training they are attending that is not directly related to the dog. This would include but is not limited to annual In- Service or the Firearms Range. Unless the Comfort Dog has been authorized by the training center and Chief of Police to attend.
- I.** The Comfort Dog shall not be taken to court when the Comfort Dog Handler has been subpoenaed or anticipates testifying unless authorized by the court and the Chief of Police
- J.** The Comfort Dog shall not be taken to any educational facility without the consent of such facility and the authorization from the Chief of Police.

CRITERIA FOR UTILIZATION 41.1.5 (I)

The Comfort Dog Handler shall assess all requests for use of the Comfort Dog before utilization. In doing so, the following criteria shall be taken into consideration:

- A.** Scene safety.
- B.** Individual (s) is willing to interact with the dog.

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- C.** No other animal(s) in the area that cannot be safely and securely separated.
- D.** The environment and status of the scene are safe for the Comfort Dog.
- E.** Individual(s) does not appear to be under the influence of drugs or alcohol.
- F.** The Comfort Dog shall not be permitted to interact with anyone exhibiting signs of impairment due to alcohol or drugs. Requesting West Brookfield Police personnel may pre-screen the request type and assist in determining Comfort Dog service appropriateness; however, once on-scene, the Comfort Dog Handler will re-assess the situation to confirm it is appropriate to utilize the Comfort Dog. Any time the comfort dog is used or deployed, the Handler will send documentation via email to the Chief of Police and the Supervisor assigned to the Handler. The Handler shall maintain an electronic copy of this information and have it available upon request of a superior officer.

TRANSPORTING THE COMFORT DOG

- A.** The Comfort Dog shall be transported in a vehicle suitable for transporting and maintaining the dog's comfort and safety
- B.** A vehicle transporting a Comfort Dog shall try to avoid emergency response driving or vehicle pursuits.
- C.** A Comfort Dog should never be left unattended in a vehicle for more than five minutes without proper ventilation and climate control
- D.** The Handler shall avoid the Comfort Dog being transported in the same vehicle as a person. All other means should be made before transporting a person if the Comfort Dog is in the vehicle.
- E.** The Comfort Dog shall not be transported on a UTV, Motorcycle, or in the back of a pick-up truck or in any manner that is unsafe for the dog.

COMFORT DOG EQUIPMENT 41.1.5 (H)

Only equipment approved by the Department will be utilized with the Comfort Dog. That equipment will be maintained and inspected regularly by the Comfort Dog Handler.

COMFORT DOG SPECIFIC TRAINING 41.1.5 (B,D,E,F)

- A.** Comfort dogs will be selected based on their temperament, demeanor, health, behavior, size, and ability to interact with unknown persons.
- B.** The Comfort Dog Handler and Comfort Dog will be specifically trained to provide services for the Department, First Responders, and citizens, comforting them to reduce anxiety during stressful and traumatic experiences.

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- C.** A certified trainer will complete the Comfort Dog's initial training.
- D.** The Comfort Dog Handler will continually train with the dog monthly to reinforce obedience and skills training with the Comfort Dog to maintain proficiency.
- E.** Comfort Dog Handlers are responsible for maintaining their proficiency with the Comfort Dog.
- F.** Each Comfort Dog must complete appropriate certification for comfort dogs successfully. The Comfort Dog will also be able to maintain the ability to pass the testing required for comfort dogs.
- G.** Each Handler will document all training in a timely manner. The Handler shall retain the training records, and a copy shall be provided to be placed in the Comfort Dogs "personal" folder.
- H.** The Comfort Dog Handler will inform the Chief of Police and or their assigned supervisor immediately if the dog develops a health condition that affects its ability to perform its duties.

VETERINARIAN SERVICES 41.1.5 (G)

The Handler shall provide all medical care for the Comfort Dog via an approved Veterinary service. These services will include, but shall not be limited to, immunizations, check-ups as required by the veterinarian, and other routine veterinary services necessary for the care, safety, and well-being of the Comfort Dog. At no time should the Comfort Dog receive regular veterinary care from any unauthorized clinic or individual. In the event of an emergency health issue, the Comfort Dog should be taken to the nearest authorized emergency veterinary clinic. All veterinary services shall be documented and maintained.

CARE OF THE COMFORT DOG/GROOMING

- A.** The Comfort Dog Handler shall regularly groom the Comfort Dog in an effort to maintain the highest level of health and well-being for the animal. The Handler will be responsible for the 24 hour care and maintenance of the dog.
- B.** It will be the responsibility of the Comfort Dog Handler to provide the Comfort Dog regular exercise to maintain a healthy weight.
- C.** The Comfort Dog Handler shall provide food at least twice daily and fresh water throughout the day.
- D.** The Comfort Dog Handler shall administer all medications, preventative and other treatments as prescribed by the veterinarian.

OFFICE PROCEDURES

- A.** While in department office space, the Comfort Dog should remain on its bed, mat, or in its crate unless the Comfort Dog Handler approves the dog to visit other people.

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- B.** The Comfort Dog shall have a mat, dog bed, and/or crate where the dog can rest while not engaged in West Brookfield Police activities and while the Comfort Dog Handler is performing work in the office. The dog will be provided a water bowl to stay hydrated in this area.
- C.** The Comfort Dog should have frequent access to water and only be given food and treats approved by the Comfort Dog Handler. At no time should another employee attempt to feed the dog unless the Comfort Dog Handler approves.
- D.** Only the Comfort Dog Handler may give commands to the Comfort Dog. At no time should another West Brookfield Police staff member attempt to give commands, exercise, perform any service, or train with the Comfort Dog, unless approved by a supervisor and the Comfort Dog Handler.
- E.** To ensure the safety of all those involved, only the Handler shall be responsible for the Comfort Dog when engaging with individuals.
- F.** If the Comfort Dog must remain in the office while the Comfort Dog Handler leaves the animal should first be taken outside for a break. If the Comfort Dog Handler is unable to return within an hour, arrangements can be made for another West Brookfield Police employee to take the animal outside for a break. This employee should be designated prior and receive a briefing on the care of the animal.
- G.** If the Comfort Dog Handler is on vacation or on a duty status that prevents proper care of the Comfort Dog, it will be the responsibility of the Handler to ensure the Comfort Dog is placed in a safe responsible location under the supervision of a responsible adult. The Chief of Police or the Handlers Supervisor shall be notified if the Comfort Dog is not available. The Comfort Dog will not be deployed while the Comfort Dog Handler is not able to perform his/her Comfort Dog duties.

RESPONDING TO REQUESTS FOR SERVICES

The Comfort Dog Handler shall contact all those involved and conduct a needs assessment to include the individuals desire to accept services of the Comfort Dog. The Comfort Dog Handler shall make the determination if it is appropriate to use the Comfort Dog based on criterion for utilization set forth herein.

COMFORT DOG UTILIZATION FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

- A.** Requesting West Brookfield Police personnel may pre-screen the call type and assist in determining Comfort Dog service appropriateness.
- B.** Once on-scene, the Comfort Dog Handler will reassess the situation to confirm it is appropriate to utilize the Comfort Dog.
- C.** A request for a presentation or visits from the Comfort Dog can be submitted to the Department for consideration. The Comfort Dog is a representative of the

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Department and can be utilized for community outreach and presentations to different community groups such as schools, churches, and civic organizations.

COMFORT DOG INJURIES

If the Comfort Dog is involved in an incident which results in an injury to the Comfort Dog, the Comfort Dog Handler will obtain the appropriate veterinary care for the animal. The Comfort Dog Handler shall notify their immediate supervisor and the Chief of Police. The supervisor will make the assessment and determination of the appropriate paperwork needed to include an internal email and or Police report through the department report writing system.

INJURIES TO OTHERS

In the event an injury occurs to an individual as a result of the Comfort Dogs actions, the Comfort Dog Handler shall start to provide immediate medical treatment and request the appropriate medical care for the individual injured. The Comfort Dog Handler's immediate supervisor shall be notified and respond as soon as practical. The Chief of Police will be notified as soon as practically possible. The supervisor will make the assessment and determination of the appropriate paperwork needed. If the injury is a result of a bite, Animal Control shall be notified to properly document the incident. All documentation of this incident shall also be placed in the Comfort Dogs "personal" file.

COMFORT DOG GENERAL SAFETY PROCEDURES

To ensure the safety of police officers and, all personnel (sworn and civilian) shall adhere to the following procedures when working with or in the vicinity of Comfort Dog team(s).

- A.** Comfort Dog handler will be responsible for instructing all department personnel about appropriate behavior and conduct in the vicinity of the Comfort Dog due to safety concerns. For example;
- B.** Department personnel will adhere to commands of the Handler during use of the Comfort Dog.
- C.** Except during exigent circumstances, or with prior approval, no one except the Handler will give commands to the Comfort Dog.
- D.** Under no circumstances will any department personnel tease or harass the Comfort Dog.
- E.** Department personnel may pet the Comfort Dog only with permission and in the presence of the Handler.
- F.** Only Comfort Dog handlers and other authorized personnel will participate in training of a department owned Comfort Dog.

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G. Comfort Dog may be controlled either on lead or off lead at the Handler's discretion. At all times, the Handler is responsible for the immediate control of the Comfort Dog.

QUALIFICATIONS, SELECTION, AND TRAINING OF COMFORT DOG HANDLERS 41.1.4.

A. Service as a Comfort Dog handler will be voluntary.

B. Prospective Comfort Dog handlers should:

C. Have an interest in Comfort dogs and their application to law enforcement.

D. Realize that Comfort Dog handlers must devote more than assigned on-duty time. Comfort Dog handlers are responsible for off-duty care, exercise, and maintenance of the police Comfort Dog. **41.1.4.**

E. Realize that, due to the time and expense involved in training the Handler and Comfort Dog, changes in duty assignments will not ordinarily be made unless the Handler and/or Comfort Dog is performing unsatisfactorily. However, changes in shift assignments may be necessary. Officers assigned as Comfort Dog handlers must be willing to commit five (5) years to the program.

COMFORT DOG HANDLERS WILL BE REQUIRED TO:

A. Be a sworn police officer below the rank of Chief of Police who has completed one (1) year of uninterrupted service as a police officer and has a satisfactory performance and disciplinary record. **41.1.4**

B. Complete refresher training to ensure the Comfort Dog and Facilitator maintain their skills and meet objectives.

C. The officer's family must consent to the officer's participation in the program.

D. The officer should own a suitable residence that will allow the placement of a Comfort Dog and proper care and control of the Comfort Dog.

INJURIES TO HANDLER OR COMFORT DOG

When a Comfort Dog handler is injured or incapacitated to the extent that they are unable to control the Comfort Dog, the safety of the Handler, other officers, and the public is the primary consideration in the method and timeliness of removing the Comfort Dog; the following precautions will be taken.

- Request immediate medical attention for the Handler and take all steps necessary to aid and protect the injured Handler.

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- If possible, allow the Comfort Dog handler to control the Comfort Dog and move the vehicle close to the injured Handler, open the vehicle door, and attempt to secure the Comfort Dog in the vehicle.
- If the Comfort Dog's Handler is incapacitated, department members should use caution and be mindful that the Comfort Dog may stand guard and attempt to prevent anyone from approaching due to the bond between the Handler and the Comfort Dog that has been formed.

The on-scene supervisor or officer-in-charge shall seek any means to best handle the Comfort Dog. This officer shall consider,

- Contacting the Handler's family that is familiar with the dog.
- Requesting another department Comfort Dog or Canine handler
- Contact Animal Control Officer to assist in securing the Comfort Dog.
- In the event of injury to the Comfort Dog, the Handler will immediately transport the Comfort Dog to a department-approved veterinarian for medical treatment.
- In the event of serious injury requiring immediate medical attention for the Comfort Dog, see Massachusetts General Law Chapter 111C Section 9A. (a) EMS personnel shall provide emergency treatment to a police dog injured in the line of duty and transport such police dog by ambulance to a veterinary care facility equipped to provide emergency treatment to dogs; provided, however, that EMS personnel shall not transport an injured police dog if providing such transport would inhibit their ability to provide emergency medical attention or transport to a person requiring such services.
- As soon as possible following an injury to the Handler or Comfort Dog, an incident report will be completed by the handler or patrol supervisor outlining the circumstances of the incident.

UNIFORM AND EQUIPMENT

A. The Comfort Dog Handler shall wear:

1. The authorized seasonally appropriate uniform and equipment in accordance with the West Brookfield Police Department uniform policy.

B. Alternate Uniform, Special Occurrence:

1. A subdued uniform of which consists of tan/Khaki or dark tactical 911 style pants, and department approved collared shirt that displays an embroidered or printed badge and the officers name, handcuffs and firearm may be worn if authorized by the Chief, or Sergeant.

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2. Patrol Uniform Shirt and Blauer Dark/Elbeco Navy blue cotton tactical uniform pants when practical to mitigate the shedding of K-9 fur/hair.
3. All uniforms will be kept neat, clean and properly pressed. Worn and tattered uniform components shall be replaced.

C. Anytime the general public has access to the Comfort Dog it shall be equipped and wear: **[41.1.4(c)]**

1. An appropriate collar and leash, no longer than 6 feet.
2. A vest or harness marked "POLICE"
3. The vest or harness may be adorned with other appropriate patches, badges or memento's in relation to its service

DISPOSITION OF COMFORT DOGS

A. Employee Owned Dog

1. The town shall not retain the dog that is owned by the handler. The owner/handler can stop using the dog at any time and at their choosing for any reason without penalty to the handler.

B. Town Owned Dog

1. Retirement of the Comfort Dog

Recommendations to retire a Comfort Dog for cause will be made through the chain of command. After consultation with the departmental veterinarian and an approved trainer the Chief of Police will make the recommendation as to whether or not the Comfort Dog may be retired to the care of the handler or stay in service. If it is determined that the Comfort Dog should be retired, the handler will have the option of adopting the dog, free of cost, for personal use.

C. Employee Leave

1. Teams Greater than Five Years partnership

In cases where a handler that has been teamed with a Comfort Dog for greater than five year leaves the department through resignation, injury, or retirement, the Comfort Dog shall be made available for adoption at no cost to the departing member, if so desired. If the handler declines adoption, the dog may be assigned to a new handler or be offered up for adoption to another as determined by the Chief of Police or his/her designee.

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2. Teams with less than five years' partnership

In cases where a handler leaves the department through resignation, injury, or retirement, prior to five years of teamwork, the Comfort Dog will remain the property of the department. If the Comfort Dog is determined to be suitable for reassignment to a new handler, it shall be retained within the unit or sold to the original handler for the cost of a replacement dog. If the Comfort Dog is determined unsuitable for reassignment, the Comfort Dog shall be made available for adoption at no cost to the departing member, if so desired. If the handler declines adoption, the dog may be assigned to a new handler or be offered up for adoption to another as determined by the Chief of Police or his/her designee.

3. Dissolution of the Program

In cases where the town of the department discontinues the program the Comfort Dog shall be made available for adoption at no cost to the handler, if so desired. If the handler declines adoption, the dog may be offered up for adoption to another as determined by the Chief of Police or his/her designee.