

HPD seeks to auction seized, surplus items

Haskel Burns, American Staff Writer 8:13 p.m. CST January 4, 2016



(Photo: American file photo)

Officials from Hattiesburg Police Department are requesting City Council's permission to auction off several seized and abandoned surplus items including 761 weapons in HPD's evidence department.

"Every year, we take in about 3,400 pieces of evidence in the evidence room," HPD evidence technician Eric Proulx said during Monday's council meeting. "Now, the majority of that is actual evidence in regards to cases, but we also take in a lot of items such as found property, lawnmowers, bicycles ... a space heater, all kinds of tools. It's not all guns.

"We do our best to try to match them up and get them back to their owners, but a lot of other items we get in have basically been sitting there in the evidence room piling up. We'd like to get rid of these things because, to be honest, we have a big space issue down there, and we keep running out of room in the evidence room."

Proulx said if all the property were to be auctioned off — which would be done through Jeff Martin Auctioneers out of Brooklyn — the department could raise in the neighborhood of \$100,000, which would go to the city's general fund. As for the guns, those would only be auctioned off to dealers with a Federal Firearms License.

"I know there is a lingering discussion out there — nationally, statewide and locally — about guns," Mayor Johnny DuPree said. "And although I know many of us in here do own guns, we still have a concern about getting guns into the hands of people that don't deserve to have guns, and I share that concern.

"But at the same time, we have about 800 guns and other things, that we're trying to build a (Public Safety) Complex, and we'd have to move them again. We've got to make a decision whether we're going to auction them off, cut them up and burn them, whatever — we just need to make that decision."

Ward 2 Councilwoman Deborah Delgado, who said she "certainly (is) for cutting them up and burning them," asked Proulx if the operators of gun shows are required to have a firearms license for that endeavor.

"They are, but you have to understand that any dealer who purchases these weapons, in accordance with the law, if they were to sell it to you, you're still going to have to fill out a background check before you can even purchase the weapon," Proulx said. "Now, you can't control a person-to-person sale at a gun show, but a dealer is required to do a background check."

HPD Chief Anthony Parker asked the council to at least permit the auction of the other items, although he would prefer to see the guns go as well.

"I just want your consideration," he said. "I'll just put it before you and let you make that decision."

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