

SWAT vehicle approved

by Marc Dadigan
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Arguing to the bitter end, the city of Champaign decided Tuesday night to allow the police department to purchase a controversial \$169,950 SWAT-team armored vehicle.

The Champaign City Council approved the purchase by a 7-2 vote.

"I'm concerned that there has been, before the end of this year, 70 SWAT missions in a community whose headlines are barely ever graced with events apt for a SWAT team," said council member Michael LaDue, who voted against the resolution.

Many concerned citizens were unaware Champaign even had a SWAT team, and council member Tom Bruno and LaDue wondered how a city of Champaign's size could need such a prodigious SWAT team, which has completed 418 missions since 1996.

Other council members who voted for the resolution were quick to remind the public that Champaign had a SWAT team and a SWAT-team vehicle since 1977 without ever attracting such attention.

"Champaign needs the SWAT team, and Champaign needs a properly equipped SWAT team," said Mayor Jerry Schweighart.

The vehicle will be paid for with \$47,800 from the city's equipment replacement fund and federal block grants awarded to the city.

The City Council also unanimously passed an ordinance that will allow the tourism department to post welcome signs in the public right-of-way for the IHSA football and wrestling championships.

The signs are part of an effort to stimulate enthusiasm for Champaign's IHSA events after the high school basketball championships were transferred to Peoria in 1997.

"These are kids who will be experiencing the pinnacle of their athletic careers," Bruno said. "I'd like them to have a warm and fuzzy feeling when they enter the city."

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