

Block Grant builds Rogers police force **By Kevin Thomas -Staff Writer**

ROGERS -- A government handout will allow the Rogers Police Department to beef up its use of force tactics.

A \$14,996 Local Law Enforcement Block Grant awarded by the Bureau of Justice Assistance was announced Monday at a meeting of the department's grant advisory board. As a requirement of the block grant, the department must match 10 percent of the 2000 grant, \$1,666, for a total of \$16,662.

Lt. George Riggs proposed to the board that the funds be used to purchase bean-bag ammunition rounds and equipment for firing the nonlethal munitions.

The board approved the motion unanimously.

"If we can get away without having to use excessive force, that's what we want to do," Riggs said. "As Rogers grows, we're going to see more and more uses of force."

The department's Special Tactics and Response Team is familiar with the bean-bag rounds fired from a 12-gauge shotgun or 37 mm tear-gas gun. Riggs said the weapons would be a first among street officers.

The objective of the bean-bag rounds are to temporarily incapacitate assailants as a last ditch effort before lethal force. Riggs said the bean-bag equipment comes in several forms. He mentioned one in particular, with a device similar to a grenade launcher for the bean-bags under a rifle barrel. That option, with an estimated cost in excess of \$500 each, Riggs said, would give officers the choice of using the bean-bag round or firing lethal ammunition.

"We have to purchase the rounds, rounds for training and the means to fire the rounds," Riggs said. "We'll have to juggle our money around."

Board member Chris Plumlee, a deputy Benton County prosecuting attorney, said the measure was a good idea. Board member James Goodwin, principal at Oakdale Junior High School, recalled when Tulsa police acquired the bean-bag rounds when he was a teacher in the city and how effective the method was there.

Riggs said the department also is in the process of getting a Taser stun gun, which would deliver an electric shock to an assailant.

The grant announcement follows a decision by the board in late June to spend the 1999 Local Law Enforcement Block Grant of \$17,215 to cover the cost of two Speedcom LP series traffic display monitoring systems.

Riggs said the department is in the process of purchasing those systems to be placed in high-traffic areas and near schools. The digital display system, mounted on a trailer, includes radar to determine how fast a driver is going and displays the speed on a large screen so the driver can see it. The device contains software to record the number of vehicles and average speeds.

The 1999 grant was applied for late and set aside until a grant advisory board and funding purpose was established, Riggs said.

He said Rogers has applied for the 2001 Local Law Enforcement Grant program, but had not heard whether the funds were awarded. But the Bureau of Justice Assistance Web site stated Monday that the city is eligible for \$16,344 for the 2001 award.

The purpose of the federal grants is to provide funds to local government bodies to underwrite projects to reduce crime and improve public safety. Block Grant funds are not to be used to buy vehicles not used primarily for law enforcement or to construct new facilities.