

Staff Report

CAMERAS IN CAMPUSTOWN

May 27, 2014

In July 2011, the City Council directed staff to prepare a report regarding the possibility of installing security cameras in Campustown. On June 26, 2012, City staff provided a report outlining what options were available to the City Council if the Council chose to pursue a camera project.

Original Report

City staff discussed the concept of installing cameras in Campustown with various stakeholder groups prior to issuing the original report. The Student Affairs Commission, the Government of the Student Body (GSB), and the Campustown Action Association (CAA) provided feedback regarding the concept. **There was generally support for the crime prevention aspects of camera systems, with many stakeholders noting that camera systems are commonly used in local businesses and on campus. GSB passed a resolution supporting the concept of installing cameras. However, CAA could not reach consensus among the membership to support or oppose the installation of cameras.**

The original report provided options for different levels of camera quality and general costs. The report also noted the importance of good lighting in order to capture effective images. **The City Council indicated its support for improving lighting in Campustown, but did not support pursuing a camera installation project.** Since that time, lighting along the 100 block of Welch Avenue has been converted to metal halide fixtures, which are less efficient but provide a whiter light. Having a white light instead of the orange light typically seen in high-pressure sodium lamps allows colors and shapes to be seen more accurately. Such lighting is helpful to incident eyewitnesses and is critical to capturing useful camera images. Electric Services will convert the 200 block of Welch Avenue to this same style of lighting later this year, and is investigating the possibility of using LED fixtures along Chamberlain Street, which would have a similar effect.

Potential Uses of Cameras

From a crime-reduction standpoint, a camera installation may have two potential benefits. One is a **deterrent effect**, in that individuals who might intend to commit a crime choose not to do so because the risk of being caught has increased beyond the reward of committing the crime. This effect requires that the individuals be aware of the surveillance, either through signage, seeing the cameras, or an informational campaign.

The challenge with this deterrent is that, if an offender is aware of the area under surveillance, it may simply cause the crime to take place elsewhere outside the view of the cameras. In alcohol-related crimes—which are prevalent in Campustown—individuals may not be able to make rational decisions about whether or not cameras deter their actions, and the crime may occur anyway.

The second benefit of cameras is the role they play in **investigating crimes** after they have taken place. The 2012 report regarding cameras noted that in the past, City staff has worked with a vendor to temporarily mount video cameras during VEISHEA, and additional private cameras were made accessible to the Police during that springtime period. Images from those cameras were used to identify a suspect in an assault that occurred on Welch Avenue. More recently, during the civil disturbance that occurred on April 8 of this year, video and still footage played a key role in the investigations of those crimes.

The 2012 staff report noted that a nine-block portion of Campustown in which camera installations might be most effective sees a higher incidence of certain types of crimes. In 2013, this area saw 294 drug/alcohol related incidents (24.5% of the City total), 167 property crime incidents (9.2% of the City total), 48 violent crimes (8.2% of the City total), and 222 other incidents (7.6% of the City total).

Cameras also have non-crime benefits that should be noted. They can be helpful to locate lost children or missing persons. This tool may have been helpful in the 2010 search for ISU student Jon Lacina, in which Mr. Lacina was last seen leaving a Campustown residence.

Potential Costs

Costs for a camera installation vary depending on the definition of the video and the transfer rate of the date. For cameras to be most useful in investigating crimes after-the-fact, both high definition cameras and high-speed fiber optic networking are required. Cameras are estimated to cost between \$1,000 and \$3,500 each. Network and storage costs total an additional \$10,000 to \$15,000. Once the original network is installed, however, it becomes easier to expand the system in phases as needed. The 2012 staff report suggested that cameras placed in two locations could observe the portion of Campustown where the majority of street crimes and large gatherings occur. State and federal grants could be pursued to purchase this equipment.

Privacy and Philosophical Considerations

Cameras could prove to be a useful tool to reduce crime. However, there are undoubtedly concerns regarding government use of cameras to record public activities.

Although police use of cameras in public places is constitutional, public comments from the 2012 discussion indicated that some residents consider the use of cameras to be an invasion of privacy—that they have a right to not be watched in a public place. This may particularly be a concern if cameras are installed in a way that hides the fact that surveillance is in use, or without warning signage.

The effectiveness of cameras is another point of discussion. It is difficult to say with certainty whether a particular camera installation would prevent crimes from happening without undertaking tests. It may also be noted that personal cell phone cameras are oftentimes likely to capture images of illegal actions, as was common during the April 8th civil disturbance. However, these images may not be as useful as those from a camera that can be manually directed at subjects of the Police Department's choosing.

Another concern is the potential for abuse, such as by directing the cameras at non-criminal or inappropriate activities. This can be mitigated by limiting real-time viewing of the images, and looking back at footage only after an incident has occurred.

The 2012 staff report proposed review of footage after-the-fact, not continuously. However, during large gatherings or in the investigation of a specific crime, the video streams may be monitored live. Additionally, video would be stored for three to five days on each camera and up to 30 days on a remote server.

Next Steps if Cameras are to be Pursued

The City Council must first decide if it agrees philosophically with the concept of installing cameras. If the City Council agrees with the concept and chooses to proceed, **City staff should be directed to study available technologies that could be utilized in the Campustown area and to bring a proposal for a specific camera project back to the City Council.** This proposal would include the number of cameras, policies for their use, updated cost estimates, and possible sources of funding.