



CITY OF
**PALO
ALTO**

City Council Staff Report

From: City Manager
Report Type: INFORMATION REPORTS
Lead Department: City Manager

Meeting Date: December 16, 2024

Report #:2410-3612

TITLE

Surveillance Technology Report for Fiscal Year 2024; CEQA Status – Not a Project.

RECOMMENDATION

This is an informational report about the City's use of surveillance technology in Palo Alto during the Fiscal Year 2024, and no City Council action is required.

BACKGROUND

In September 2019, Council adopted the Surveillance and Privacy Protection Ordinance establishing criteria and procedures for protection of personal privacy when considering the acquisition and use of surveillance technologies by the City¹. Codified in the Municipal Code at Chapter 2.30, Part 6A, the ordinance also outlines ongoing monitoring and annual reporting of such technologies. Annual reporting must include the following information pursuant to PAMC section 2.30.680(a):

1. A description of how each Council-approved surveillance technology was used, including whether it captured images, sound, or information regarding members of the public who are not suspected of engaging in unlawful conduct.
2. Whether and how often data acquired through the use of the surveillance technology was shared with outside entities, the name of any recipient entity, the types of data disclosed, and the reason for the disclosure.
3. A summary of any community complaints or concerns about the surveillance technology.
4. Non-privileged and non-confidential information regarding the results of any internal audits, information about violations of the surveillance use policy, and any actions taken in response;

¹ City Council 9/10/2018, [Packet 20230808180403837.pdf \(primegov.com\)](#)

5. Whether the surveillance technology has been effective at achieving its identified purpose;
6. The number and nature of Public Records Act requests relating to the surveillance technology.
7. Annual costs for the surveillance technology and for the compliance with this surveillance and privacy protection ordinance, including personnel and other ongoing costs, and sources or funding; and
8. Other relevant information as determined by the City Manager

This report covers activity in Fiscal Year 2024.

ANALYSIS

Pursuant to the approved ordinance, the following departmental activities are summarized in the body of this report.

PUBLIC SAFETY

Police Public Contact – On June 18, 2024, the Council approved the contract with LensLock, an audio and video system that will be used to document public contacts². This includes but is not limited to; traffic stops, parking enforcement, suspect interviews, witness interviews, victim interviews, and any other citizen contact in response to a call for service or when investigating criminal activity through user-activated audio and video recordings. The system's metadata will automatically flow into the evidence management application where video assets are verified as original or exact duplicates (non-edited data) and managed as evidence.

The ongoing cost of the service will total \$1,074,000, or \$214,900 annually. The contract will cost \$1,181,400, including the additional services if required. The funding for the contract is from the Capital Budget Project PD-20000—Police Video Recording Systems Replacement. To date, there have been no audits, formal complaints or PRAs filed. The deployment of this technology is scheduled for January 2025.

GPS Vehicle Tracking – On April 15th, 2024, Council approved the contract with StarChase LLC for GPS Vehicle Tracking Implementation to safely track vehicles that may have been used in a crime. The StarChase Guardian system allows officers to launch a small GPS tracking device from a patrol vehicle and affix it to a fleeing suspect vehicle. The suspect vehicle can then be tracked remotely, in lieu of a vehicle pursuit, and contacted later at a safer, more advantageous location.

² City Council Meeting Action Minutes, 6/18/2024:

<https://portal.laserfiche.com/Portal/DocView.aspx?id=94483&repo=r-704298fc>

The total cost of a three-year term is not to exceed \$224, 657. In year one, this contract will come at a total (grant-funded) cost of \$165,308, including the launchers and GPS devices, initial installation, and setup, 2-year warranty, user training, data storage, and tracking platform access. The second year will come at a total (grant-funded) cost of \$26,400, for continued tracking platform access and data storage. Year three will come at a total cost of \$32,955, including continued tracking platform access, data storage, and a third year of warranty coverage. The technology was recently launched on December 2 and no audits, PRAs, or complaints been received.

eCitation Devices – On March 14, 2022, Council approved the acquisition of handheld electronic citation devices with Optical Character Recognition (OCR) technology for the purposes of traffic violation enforcement by police officers³. When in use, the cameras capture license plate images that are processed through OCR analysis to call up the vehicle make, and model information used to issue citation violations. The technology improves accuracy of information as well as eliminating the need for manual entry into the Records Management System (RMS). In FY2024 the maintenance cost was \$17,166.

The department issued 1,789 citations in FY2024, a significant increase from last fiscal year's just over 300 citations since its deployment. This has also led to a substantial reduction in staff processing time, overall the technology has been successful in achieving its intended purpose. Citations are automatically uploaded into both the City's Records Management System (RMS) and the Santa Clara Traffic Court system. To date, there have been no complaints registered, audits nor any Public Records Act (PRA) requests.

Fixed Automated License Plate Recognition (ALPR) – On April 3, 2023, Council approved the contract with Flock Safety to implement fixed ALPR surveillance technology as well as approved a use policy for the new camera equipment⁴. ALPR technology uses a combination of cameras and computer software to scan the license plates of passing vehicles and other vehicle characteristics such as make, model, type, and color. The technology can provide real-time alerts when stolen or wanted vehicles enter an area and provides enhanced investigative capabilities when a crime has already occurred. The annual cost of the contract is \$52,500. This cost is inclusive of camera use and database access. This was paid using the General Fund money.

ALPR data sharing among local law enforcement partners allows agencies to collaboratively investigate, identify, and apprehend multi-jurisdictional offenders, or those who commit crimes in one jurisdiction but reside in another. The City currently has a Memorandum of

³ City Council Meeting 3/14/2022, Agenda Item #9, PDF Page 113, <https://www.cityofpaloalto.org/files/assets/public/v/8/agendas-minutes-reports/agendas-minutes/city-council-agendas-minutes/2022/20220314/20220314pccsm-amended-final-revised-ppt.pdf>

⁴ City Council Meeting 4/3/2023, <https://www.cityofpaloalto.org/files/assets/public/v/1/police-department/public-information-portal/alpr-staff-report-4-3-2023.pdf>

Understanding (MOU) with local agencies listed in Attachment A, where data is shared for legitimate law enforcement investigative purposes related to a specific criminal investigation. The technology has been successful in achieving its intended purpose. Thus far, real-time alerts have contributed to the recovery of stolen and wanted vehicles, and investigative searches have contributed to the identification and apprehension of criminal suspects. To date, there have been no registered complaints or violations reported. While there has been some community concern about the potential for misuse of the technology, the City has a clear policy on its management and use⁵. There have been no PRAs requested in FY24.

Transportation

Traffic Signal Detection Hardware – On February 6th, 2023, the Council approved the contract with Iteris for traffic signal operations⁶. The devices only detect when a vehicle is approaching an intersection to serve the vehicle a green light phase. Currently, no data is being collected; it is only used for real-time traffic signal operations. The system may provide data, including the number of vehicles and when they arrive. No video or identifying information is or would be collected other than the presence of a vehicle or bicycle.

The City has received complaints regarding our lack of video data collection. Members of the public frequently request video footage, but we currently do not capture or store this type of data. There have been no PRAs requested for FY24. Overall, this surveillance technology has been very effective. This type of surveillance is successful and has been in use with traffic signal operations within Palo Alto for over 20 years. The total annual contract cost is \$80,000.

Automatic License Plate Recognition (ALPR) Parking Enforcement. In February 2021, Council approved the use of license plate recognition technology to be used for parking enforcement and permit management.⁷ ALPR technology captures images of license plates to identify vehicle information and track parking time. The images of license plates are for parking enforcement only, data is expunged within 96 hours.

Although some residents may have reservations about utilizing automated software and databases for parking enforcement, there have been no formal complaints filed, violations of its use, nor PRA requests. In assessing its effectiveness, ALPR has successfully supported City Residential Preferential Parking programs, providing both enforcement and permit management efficiencies. Future use of ALPR will include use in public garages and lots such as California Avenue garage, as well as other Downtown garages where Parking Guidance System

⁵ City Council Staff Report and Policy on Fixed ALPR: <https://www.cityofpaloalto.org/files/assets/public/v/1/police-department/public-information-portal/alpr-staff-report-4-3-2023.pdf>

⁶ City Council Meeting-[Staff Report 2301-0754](#)

⁷ City Council Meeting 2/22/2021, <https://www.cityofpaloalto.org/files/assets/public/v/1/city-manager/misc/public-records-act-request-and-response-for-alpr-data.pdf>

(provides real-time car parking information such as vehicle and slot counts) Four downtown garages are getting parking guidance systems installed this fiscal year. The total annual contract cost is \$7,500 funded by the Parking Management and System Implementation Capital Improvement Project (CIP).

Traffic Data Collection Cameras. In April 2021, Council approved the use of video technology for traffic data collection⁸. The low-resolution video is used to collect bicycle, pedestrian, parking occupancy and vehicular turning movement counts. Data collected is used to inform appropriate traffic control measures or roadway improvements, signal timings, pedestrian, and bicycle roadway improvements. It does not collect or retain audio, visual, location, nor other personally identifiable information of people or vehicles.

During the reporting period, no data was shared with outside entities, nor were there any technology use violations. There were no complaints or concerns about video cameras this year. These cameras are temporarily installed only during the data collection period and visible and clear information was posted at the location of each camera that clearly identified its use, recording period, service provider name, and phone number. The use of the cameras was successful at achieving its intended purpose and provided important and accurate data that otherwise would have been expensive to collect manually. The total cost for a 4-year term is not to exceed \$200,000. This was paid for with Capital Improvement Program and the General Fund.

EXEMPT SURVEILLANCE EQUIPMENT INCLUDED FOR INFORMATION ONLY

The surveillance ordinance excludes the following surveillance technology, among others, from reporting:

- Any technology that collects information exclusively on or regarding City employees or contractors;
- Any technology used as part of the Foothills Fire Early Warning System to detect fires within the following areas:
 - West Side: Skyline Blvd (Hwy 35) from Route 84 (Woodside Rd/La Honda Rd.) to Hwy 9
 - North Side: Route 84 from Skyline to Alameda de las Pulgas
 - East Side: Alameda de las Pulgas to Santa Cruz Ave to Junipero Serra Rd. to Foothill Expwy.
 - South Side: Draw a line from the intersection of Hwy 9 at Hwy 35 to the intersection of Foothill Expwy at Magdalena.

⁸City Council Meeting 4/5/2021, <https://www.cityofpaloalto.org/files/assets/public/v/2/agendas-minutes-reports/reports/city-manager-reports-cmrs/year-archive/2021/id-11985.pdf>

The following two surveillance systems fall under these exemptions but are included in this report for Council awareness.

Foothills Fire Safety Cameras. As part of the improvements to the Foothills Management Plan the Office of Emergency Services deployed several AlertWildfire cameras in the Foothills for early detection of wildfires as part of an interagency and countywide effort. This program is now called Alert California.⁹

Electric Station Perimeter Security Cameras. Following the recommendations of a commissioned security risk assessment of all the City's electric substations, and supported by Federal regulation, the City installed perimeter lighting and camera upgrades. The completed system consists of lighting poles installed at specific perimeter locations at the nine electric substations, with downward-facing pendant light fixtures that have prismatic glass to reduce LED glare, intelligent foot-candle control for accurate lighting distribution where directed, dimming features to keep the foot candle level low unless a trespasser is sensed, and visors to limit light pollution. We have installed perimeter lighting and camera upgrades at 7 of the 9 substations. Video cameras were also mounted on the poles, with analytics added at the Utility Control Center that will allow for alarming, detection, and quick review of camera footage. Because the location of the substations and its cameras are only accessible to City employees and its contractors, it is considered exempt. Currently, we have installed perimeter lighting and camera upgrades at 7 of the 9 substations. The City plans to solicit the RFP for the remaining two stations this winter and start construction in Spring 2025.

FISCAL/RESOURCE IMPACT

The work described within this report is being accomplished within current budgets unless otherwise noted.

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

Presenting this information to the public, parallel to its transmittal to the City Council, ensures that stakeholders throughout the community remain apprised of the City's ongoing acquisition and work in surveillance technologies and privacy protections.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

This item is an informational report with no action required by the Council, and therefore it is not a project under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A: List of agencies sharing Police ALPR data with MOU terms

APPROVED BY: Ed Shikada, City Manager

⁹ Alert California: <https://cameras.alertcalifornia.org/?pos=37.3200 -122.1700 10>