

Berkeley City Council

CONSENT CALENDAR

June 3, 2014

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council

From: Councilmembers Gordon Wozniak and Susan Wengraf

Subject: Security Camera Database to Help Solve Crimes

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Ask the City Manager to report on the possibility of setting up a database under the purview of the Berkeley Police Department that would allow individuals to register private security surveillance cameras with the City. The goal is to set up a resource for police to help them contact nearby camera owners after a crime has been committed.

Using the database, police would be able to look up registered cameras near the location of a criminal incident and would then be able to contact the owners of the registered camera(s) and ask them if their camera(s) captured evidence of the crime and if the owner is interested in contributing potentially-relevant footage to the police.

The program would be entirely voluntary for community members and the database would only give police information about who to contact. Officers would still have to ask business owners and residents who have registered their cameras if they would like to turn over sections of their footage to the police.

CURRENT SITUATION AND ITS EFFECTS:

Every week when Berkeleyside updates their weekly Crime Blotter, it is apparent that most burglaries, car-jacking incidents, and other crimes take place along commercial corridors and major traffic arteries.

It seems as though the Berkeley Police Department and the City as a whole could benefit if interested businesses and individuals who own security cameras could volunteer to register their cameras with the City. That way, if a crime occurred at or near a certain address, the Berkeley Police Department could ask nearby owners of registered cameras if their footage captured any evidence of the crime.

Since it would be neither cost-effective nor respectful of individual privacy for the City to install such a network of cameras, this could be an innovative and cost-effective way to provide the police with more resources to help solve crimes.

Similar systems have already been set up in Chicago, Illinois, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, San Leandro, Fremont, and Vallejo, and San Jose is currently debating implementing their own database.

The program is credited with extraordinary success in Fremont, where they began compiling their database in 2012 and burglaries are down 20% since then.¹

In San Jose, one City Councilmember has made a proposal to allow property owners to voluntarily register their cameras with the new police database. However, the proposal also includes giving the police the ability to remotely tap into the feeds of those registered cameras.² Although this could constitute a huge improvement over the current system where police officers must go door-to-door after a crime and ask if people even have cameras, serious privacy concerns have been raised about granting police remote access to private camera feeds.

One possible way to mitigate this concern and strengthen individual privacy protections under such a program is to allow police to keep a database of voluntarily-registered cameras but not to give them remote access to those feeds. This is exactly what has been done in Vallejo, which just launched their program on May 1, 2014. In an article about Vallejo's program, their Police Chief noted: "Police would not have direct access to the private cameras and would have to ask the owner to view any footage. Information about the registered participants would not be shared with the public or the media."³

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

Unknown. Staff time involved in preparing reports with findings for the City Council.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT:

Unknown. Resources involved in preparing reports with findings for the City Council.

¹ Article: "**Newark burglaries drop as residents get involved, police upgrade technology**" by Chris De Benedetti for the San Jose Mercury News. Published Mar. 29, 2014; accessed May 6, 2014.

http://www.mercurynews.com/crime-courts/ci_25448644/newark-burglaries-drop-residents-get-involved-police-upgrade.

² Article: "**San Jose Police could tap into volunteer residents' private security cameras under new proposal**" by Mike Rosenberg for the San Jose Mercury News. Published Jan. 23, 2014; accessed May 5, 2014.

http://www.mercurynews.com/crime-courts/ci_24979753/san-jose-police-would-tap-into-residents-private.

³ Article: "**Vallejo Police launch project to utilize private surveillance cameras**" by Jana Katsuyama for KTVU Channel 2 News. Published May 1, 2014; Accessed May 5, 2014. <http://www.ktvu.com/news/news/crime-law/vallejo-police-launch-project-utilize-private-surv/nfmfR/>.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Article: “**Newark burglaries drop as residents get involved, police upgrade technology**” by Chris De Benedetti for the San Jose Mercury News. Published Mar. 29, 2014; accessed May 6, 2014. http://www.mercurynews.com/crime-courts/ci_25448644/newark-burglaries-drop-residents-get-involved-police-upgrade.
2. Article: “**San Jose Police could tap into volunteer residents private security cameras under new proposal**” by Mike Rosenberg for the San Jose Mercury News. Published Jan. 23, 2014; accessed May 5, 2014. http://www.mercurynews.com/crime-courts/ci_24979753/san-jose-police-would-tap-into-residents-private.
3. Article: “**Vallejo Police launch project to utilize private surveillance cameras**” by Jana Katsuyama for KTVU Channel 2 News. Published May 1, 2014; Accessed May 5, 2014. <http://www.ktvu.com/news/news/crime-law/vallejo-police-launch-project-utilize-private-surv/nfmfR/>.

CONTACT PERSONS:

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Newark burglaries drop as residents get involved, police upgrade technology

By Chris De Benedetti The Argus San Jose Mercury News

Posted: Sat Mar 29 14:33:39 MDT 2014

MercuryNews.com

Tri-City residents fed up with home burglaries have fought back by partnering with law enforcement agencies, employing a mix of Neighborhood Watch groups and teams of police volunteers, sometimes using upgraded technology to catch criminals.

It's hard to argue with the results, as burglary rates are down throughout southern Alameda County this year, police agencies say.

Fremont burglaries decreased 20 percent between 2012 and last year, and Union City's rate dipped by 3 percent. Newark enjoyed the steepest drop, 41 percent.

The city of around 42,500 people has succeeded in attacking the crime from several sides, said Tim Jones, a member of Newark police's community engagement team. "It's not one singular thing that has done it," he said. "It's been about people working more in unison with police."

Newark's turnaround started in early 2012, when Mayor Alan Nagy took office, Jones said. Nagy made the growth of Neighborhood Watch groups a priority and residents responded by creating 45 active watch organizations.

Those watch groups -- trained and managed by Jones and his supervisor, retired Cmdr. Donna Shearn -- have emerged as the department's eyes and ears on the street, Jones said.

"We have trained neighborhood captains and given them cheat sheets on what to say to dispatchers so they report crimes more efficiently and accurately," he said. "Dispatchers are reporting that calls have become much better and clearer, helping us send officers to crime scenes more quickly."

Newark's community engagement team also oversees more than 50 police volunteers donating time to the graffiti removal team and the RAVEN program, in which volunteers interview witnesses in minor crimes, check on vacationers' homes and take on clerical duties. The work might seem mundane but it yields positive results, Jones said.

"It lets the black-and-white go out and chase bad guys," he said.

Plus, Newark's new records management system allows officers to write reports and do other administrative work much more quickly than before, said Cmdr. Michael Carroll. "That frees officers to patrol the streets and follow up on tips," he said.

As a result, police response times have improved, making residents more likely to contact authorities when they see a crime, Carroll said.

"What's changing is the community is really involved in helping us," he said. "When people really own their neighborhoods, they make us so much more effective."

Neighboring cities have enjoyed success from similar methods.

Fremont has lowered its burglaries from 1,176 in 2012 to 944 the following year by communicating with residents through crime watch groups and social media. But perhaps the city's most distinctive crime-fighting technique involves private surveillance cameras, said police spokeswoman Geneva Bosques.

Fremont police have created a database of surveillance cameras citywide so that, whenever a burglary occurs, detectives can ask the nearest camera-system owner to share their footage, Bosques said.

"We know the community wants to help us," she said. "So, we're trying to give them the information they need to be more involved."

In Union City, Cmdr. Ben Horner said its increase in Neighborhood Watch groups explains its slight decrease in burglaries.

"We have more than 50 watch programs now," he said. "Our citizens have become very good about calling in about suspicious persons."

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San Jose police could tap into volunteer residents' private security cameras under new proposal

By Mike Rosenberg mrosenberg@mercurynews.com San Jose Mercury News

Posted: Thu Jan 23 16:16:28 MST 2014

MercuryNews.com

SAN JOSE -- Police would be able to tap into private video camera recordings from San Jose residents who agree to provide access to authorities under a new proposal that would expand investigators' watchful eye over the city but already is raising big brother-type privacy concerns.

Councilman Sam Liccardo's proposal, unveiled Thursday and set to be discussed by a City Council committee next week, would allow property owners voluntarily to register their security cameras for a new San Jose Police Department database. Officers then would be able to access the footage quickly after a nearby crime has occurred.

It is the latest effort designed to shore up public safety in a city that has seen its reputation as one of the safest big cities in America take a hit in recent years as crime rates have surged and officers have left in droves. The issue is taking center stage heading into the June primary to replace outgoing Mayor Chuck Reed as five local leaders jockey for position as tough-on-crime candidates.

Liccardo, among several council members running for mayor, unveiled the proposal in response to the string of arson fires that terrorized his downtown-area district this month. Police used surveillance videos provided voluntarily by nearby property owners as key evidence in identifying a suspect they arrested on suspicion of burning about a dozen buildings.

"It became apparent that there's a lot of evidence out there that residents want to provide," Liccardo said, predicting that the cost would be nominal because existing city technology employees could maintain the database. The new database "is something that costs very little but could have a big impact in making San Jose safer."

Already police can ask property owners like the ones in the arson-ravaged neighborhood for surveillance footage but have to go door-to-door searching for cameras, a cumbersome process for a police force that is understaffed.

The new program would allow property owners to sign up for a security camera database so that police responding to burglaries, assaults and other crimes would see a map of nearby locations with cameras. As long as property owners agree, police would be able to remotely tap into feeds for high-tech cameras, but older models would require residents to turn over the actual tapes.

A San Jose police spokeswoman said the department is interested in the idea but still is exploring its merits, including potential costs and privacy concerns.

"We also would have to factor in how such a system would be weighed against other pressing priorities for our limited time and resources," Sgt. Heather Randol said.

Privacy groups say the latest proposal is part of a broader trend toward a world where authorities have more surveillance access to places that once were considered private.

"To me the really interesting and troublesome part of it is the way we are starting to privatize government surveillance -- to enlist private citizens in a way that is kind of unprecedented and could be potentially really dangerous," said Hanni Fakhoury, a staff attorney for the Electronic Frontier Foundation, a San Francisco-based nonprofit. "Once you give the police unfettered access 24/7, you're relying on them to exercise their restraint."

Retired judge LaDoris Cordell, the city's independent police auditor, said the proposal is the next logical extension of technological advances that have helped provide cops with more video of crimes. It's common now for onlookers to take cellphone videos of officers, and the San Jose Police Department is working on a new program to equip officers with body-worn cameras.

"You tend to behave when the cameras are on you," Cordell said. She doesn't see the idea so much as an "intrusion on privacy" but as a way for residents to "know what's going on in their neighborhood."

San Jose would join big cities such as Philadelphia and Chicago and small towns such as nearby Los Gatos and Monte Sereno that recently have launched similar initiatives.

About 600 Philadelphia business owners and residents have signed up with the program since it was launched two years ago, helping lead to 200 arrests based on videos from their cameras, said Philadelphia police officer Jillian Russell.

The Los Gatos/Monte Sereno Police Department, which just started its database a few months ago, has 30 property owners signed up, said Officer Catherine Mann.

"We haven't had any negative responses, once we get it out to them that this is not a 'Big Brother' " situation, Mann said. "We're not sitting around watching live videos from their home."

Liccardo knows he faces a similar privacy challenge in trying to get the plan approved in San Jose in the coming months but insists cops will not be viewing live feeds.

Also part of the political calculation is the fact that three of his colleagues also are running for mayor: Vice Mayor Madison Nguyen, Councilman Pierluigi Oliverio and Councilwoman Rose Herrera. In addition, Santa Clara County Supervisor Dave Cortese is running and has criticized the current administration for San Jose's rising crime rate.

Liccardo dismissed the idea that the proposal was politically motivated, saying it's about protecting residents.

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Posted: 1:14 a.m. Thursday, May 1, 2014

Vallejo police launch project to utilize private surveillance cameras



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By Jana Katsuyama

KTVU.com

VALLEJO, Calif. — The Vallejo Police Department launched a new program Wednesday called Project V-Cam, which they say could give them better access to private surveillance cameras to help solve crimes.

The project asks residents and businesses with private cameras to partner with police and register their cameras with the department.

"Our goal with that is to catalog and know where all the privately owned cameras are throughout Vallejo," said Captain James O'Connell, of the Vallejo Police Department.

Vallejo Police aim to create a citywide map so officers can know where to look for surveillance footage near a crime scene.

The City of Vallejo has more than 30 cameras in crime hot spots. Police are hoping to expand that with Project V-Cam.

"It's entirely voluntary, if people don't want to participate, there's no obligation to participate and we absolutely respect that," O'Connell told KTVU Wednesday.

Police say the number of private cameras is on the rise. Participation in Project V-Cam would be voluntary. Police would not have direct access to the private cameras and would have to ask the owner to view any footage. Information about the registered participants would not be shared with the public or the media.

One family told KTVU thieves recently stole computer tablets from their home and they are considering getting a surveillance camera. They liked the idea of Project V-Cam.

"There's a lot of crime going around and it's not safe, so I think it's good," said Nicholas Nicholas of Vallejo.

Vallejo's Mayor Osby Davis says Project V-Cam is about partnering with the public and is just one step to help a police force that shrank in numbers during the city's bankruptcy.

"We will be probably up to 100 officers at the end of June," the mayor told KTVU.

Davis said that would be 20 officers more than Vallejo Police had 8 months ago. He also told KTVU he is working on another plan to require surveillance cameras at some businesses.

"To have businesses in our community that take cash have cameras in their premises, so that it may be a deterrent to people who rob places," the mayor told KTVU.

The owner of Momo's Cafe in downtown Vallejo is hopeful Project V-Cam will help reduce crime.

"It's actually gotten better compared to what it was before," said Manny Melendrez, "If there's a crime that's going on, it should be solved you know, I think it's for the better to better the city."


Project V-Cam launched at 2 p.m. Wednesday and by 6 p.m. five people had already signed up and registered their cameras. Parties interested in signing up for the program can get more information at the city of Vallejo website.

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