

To: Town Meeting Members**Subject: Article 25, Resolution to terminate one-year trial of surveillance cameras****From: Sarah Wunsch, principal petitioner, and Frank Farlow, co-chair of Brookline PAX**

Following is detailed information concerning three aspects of the camera issue: effectiveness in preventing crime, inevitable "mission creep" and cost.

EFFECTIVENESS IN PREVENTING CRIME

Assessing the impact of CCTV (closed-circuit TV, Britain's terminology for video surveillance systems) is a professional, 175-page study published in 2005 by the Research, Development and Statistics Directorate of the British Home Office, the mission of which is "to provide the public and Parliament with information necessary for informed debate." (Study available online at <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs05/hors292.pdf>)

The foreword states: "No previous research has examined in such detail the issues faced in ensuring effective operation of CCTV systems. The authors have undertaken a painstaking analysis of the effectiveness of systems, both with respect to the impact on crime as recorded by the police and wider measures ..." (p. 3)

The main objective of the study was "to measure the impact of the CCTV projects on crime and fear of crime." Of the thirteen representative systems evaluated, with as many as 600 video cameras, "only two showed a statistically significant [crime] reduction relative to the control, and in one of these cases the change could be explained by the presence of confounding variables. Crime increased in seven areas ..." (p. 8)

The report points out that in a separate meta-analysis conducted in 2002, of the eighteen studies included, half showed a desirable effect and half did not. (p. 20) The Home Office study concludes that "the review of previous work does not offer conclusive evidence that CCTV on its own impacts positively on crime levels." (p. 20)

In the twelve areas where public attitudes were surveyed, citizens who were aware of the local presence of cameras actually worried more about becoming a victim of crime than those who were not. In residential areas, the percentage of those who perceived the impact of CCTV to be positive decreased following its installation in all the areas surveyed." (p. 11)

In February, the Constitution Committee of Britain's House of Lords (akin to our Senate) concluded that the widespread use of surveillance cameras constitutes a "serious threat" to historic rights to privacy and civil liberties, ("Lords Committee Seeks Dramatic Reduction of Intrusion into Private Life," The Independent, 2/6/09)

FUTURE MISSION CREEP

Proponents who initially recommend a certain quantity and quality of equipment for a program of this sort will inevitably return later to recommend more, and better. The denial of such future requests to broaden the mission will be as difficult then as denying the proposal before you is today. It's estimated that Britain, which at one point, like Brookline, had only a few cameras, now has one for every thirteen citizens.

There will be various kinds of impetus for future requests:

- to increase tracking capability – obtain more cameras, and cameras with greater resolving

power, to track offenders as they move from one area to another – ultimately, to keep them continuously in view. (According to the UK report, “the main objective of urban centre systems was to track offenders.”) More – and better – cameras.

- to increase analytic capability – acquire computer programs currently available or under development that increase the capability of the system, e.g., by providing image enhancement, or automatic identification of suspects through correlation of their images with previously established dossiers of biometric or other data. Each program necessitates more extensive training of police and others. More-intrusive accessory computer programs.
- to foil “crime displacement” – The Home Office study points out that “[t]he danger in covering only hotspot areas is displacement of crime” into other nearby areas. The more serious the crime (i.e., the greater the penalty for apprehension), the more a potential criminal will be motivated to avoid known surveillance areas and move into nearby unsurveilled ones. More cameras.
- to increase live monitoring – According to the UK study, “Control room studies found that only 26 percent of incidents were prompted by outside agencies such as police contacts ... while [live monitors] themselves identified 74 percent of incidents.” The current trial is said to involve, for the most part, “passive monitoring,” i.e., intermittent checking of the monitors. Over time, pressure will rise to expand live monitoring. Next will come two-way communication between live monitors and patrol officers: “We rely on the radios. They’re our eyes and ears, really, to find out what’s going on. It would be better if we could talk to police on the radio as well. We can watch them on the screen missing the right person, because we cannot communicate with them at the time...” Clearly, if an objective is to direct police to incidents, then two-way communication is a prerequisite. More personnel assigned to live monitoring.

COST

Town Meeting Members are distinctly handicapped by having been furnished merely a rough estimate of the equipment maintenance portion of the total budget for the initial year of the public surveillance program. The Advisory Committee, our financial watchdog, possessed not even a rudimentary accounting of the dollar value of Police Department and Town Hall personnel time and other resources that have already been committed to this program as well as those that will be required going forward for its continuing implementation.

Such an accounting would not have been difficult to prepare. Of the following partial list of 25 expense items, which we provided to the selectmen six months ago, a strong majority have been taken directly from Chief O’Leary’s undated “Draft Special Order VCMS,” which details the wide range of activities that the proposal will entail within the Police Department.

Equipment-related

- daily equipment inspection
- future repair, replacement and installation

Records

- maintaining records of and responding to requests from other communities to view real-time images or archival footage and, in reverse, making such requests and tracking responses
- tracking the chain of custody of recordings and reproductions of footage obtained from other communities and state or federal agencies
- maintenance, storage and tracking of the “Daily Recording” from the cameras
- daily maintenance of the camera inventory log by the Technology Division
- establishment and administration of user names, passwords and Operation Access Codes for all police officers and dispatchers
- tracking the periods of employment of mobile cameras when used to supplement the “take” from the DHS cameras
- maintaining records of daily equipment inspections
- ensuring the chain of custody of recordings and reproductions of video footage for evidentiary purposes in civil and criminal court actions

Activities

Police Dept

- policy development and periodic review
- continuing multi-faceted training and updating of current and new personnel
- frequent discussion throughout the police department of implementation details and updates
- collaborative communication with fellow Metro-Boston Homeland Security Region communities
- live (“real time”) monitoring of the displays in the Dispatch Area, the Emergency Operations Center, the Detective Division and the office of the Commanding Officer
- daily checking of all “preferred camera views”
- ongoing research and review of potential software and hardware acquisitions and upgrades (e.g., automatic identification or automated tracking programs)
- preparation and presentation of system-related grant proposals and budget requests

Town Hall

- surveillance-related work performed by Town administrators and personnel, Police officers and others in staffing the Board of Selectmen and other Town agencies such as the Selectmen’s Surveillance Oversight Committee
- surveillance-related work performed by the office of Town Counsel (including defense against – let alone settling – citizen suits) and by Finance Department employees

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- legal work by Town Counsel in preparing the Town’s defense against (let alone settling) any surveillance-related citizen suits
- Miscellaneous
- use of office space for system components and operators who would otherwise be available for alternative uses
- compensation of past and future outside consultants