Appropriations Committee

Chairman Brodeur, Tramontozzi, Boisselle, Buonopane, Conn, Forbes, Infurna, Seaboyer, Wright, Mortimer
Absent: Heavey
In attendance: Police Chief Mike Lyle, IT Director Jorge Pazos, Mike Devitas of Surveillance Specialties

Appropriations called to order by Chairman Brodeur at 7:07 p.m. President Mortimer motions to open Public Participation, 2nd by Alderman Boisselle. All in favor. No one comes forward. President Mortimer motions to close Public Participation, 2nd by Alderman Boisselle. All in favor.

Order No. 08-029, Requesting that Chief Lyle and other appropriate city officials appear before the Board of Aldermen to provide information about the planned installation of security cameras in the city. (AL-1)

Chairman Brodeur says the purpose of this evening's meeting is for a demonstration of how the security cameras work, and defers to Police Chief Lyle and Mr. Devitas.

Mr. Devitas says he brought a hand held zoom camera which is different than the camera proposed but will demonstrate the capacity of whiting out windows in residences. This allows the police to zoom in on an area without intrusion of residents in a neighborhood. Looking at the monitor, he says the street light outside the window where the camera is placed is causing glare. The camera is focused on the florist and gift shop on Upham Street. The window has been blocked out – this is the privacy zone. When zooming and panning, the rest of the building isn't blocked and the zone grows and shrinks. Multiple privacy zones are possible; the blocked out window above the florist shop is located in a house behind the building.

Alderman Forbes asks it the blocked zone is permanent. Mr. Devitas says yes, once set it is protected with a password.

Alderman Boisselle asks what type of storage is utilized. Mr. Devitas says it is DVR hard drive storage. Alderman Boisselle asks how long the recording may be kept. Mr. Devitas says up to five weeks. Chief Lyle says it will be erased every 30 days.

Alderman Wright asks if objects in front of the blocked areas are visible. Mr. Devitas says no. Alderman Wright asks who will have the passwords. Chief Lyle says he and Mr. Pazos will have them. Alderman Wright asks if the settings can be revised. Mr. Devitas says they will be permanent unless an addition is built. Alderman Wright asks if it is possible for someone to view the building if they want verification that their windows are blocked; Chief Lyle says yes.

Alderman Boisselle asks if there will be signage indicating that cameras are in use. Chief Lyle says the cameras will be visible but he has no intention of posting notice of a surveillance area. He will however comply with Massachusetts General Laws.

Alderman Seaboyer asks what controls will be used to operate the cameras. Mr. Devitas says there are two ways: a keyboard with password authorization and a digital controller. Alderman Seaboyer asks if there is a way to simplify it to use a mouse. Mr. Devitas says no. Alderman Seaboyer asks if the camera angle will be a fixed view or moving. Chief Lyle says the Winthrop School will be fixed; the camera at Wyoming will be determined after a site visit.

Alderman Forbes asks how many cameras they are starting with. Chief Lyle says two, at $900 each. Alderman Forbes asks if six cameras will require six separate screens. Mr. Devitas says there can be six screens or one. Alderman Forbes asks where the screens will be located. Chief Lyle says in the dispatch area. Alderman Forbes asks how the cameras will hold up in New England weather. Mr. Devitas says the cameras are stored in environmental housing. Alderman Forbes asks if it is possible to zoom in close enough to get a license plate number. Mr. Devitas says yes and zooms in on a car parked outside.

Alderman Conn commends Chief Lyle for all of his new ideas and asks if there is any local community using these cameras. Chief Lyle says Chelsea is using them. Mr. Pazos says they are used in Malden, too. Most of Route 60 and Malden Square are under surveillance. He says some other communities are using them on a limited basis. Alderman Conn asks if there are any statistics on the number of incidents going to court. Chief Lyle says the Orange Line surveillance program has resultg in 92 arrests in six months – felony and warrant arrests. Alderman Conn asks if the arrests were solely as a result of camera surveillance; Chief Lyle says yes.

Alderman Buonopane asks if there is any concern that once the cameras are in place that people will move to another area. Chief Lyle says the Wyoming area was chosen for the pilot program because it's the closest business area to the fiber network. Alderman Buonopane asks if there is concern that once word gets out that traffic will move to another area. Chief Lyle says he doesn't believe it will.

Alderman Wright says it is his impression that there is crime activity in the Wyoming area due to easy access to Malden and Oak Grove and Route 93. He doesn't think that criminal activity will move to another area of the City.

Alderman Boisselle asks if it is possible to zoom in on a license plate after the fact. Mr. Devitas says that capability is very limited and in most cases it can't be done.

Alderman Forbes asks how difficult it is to move the camera to another location. Mr. Devitas says it isn't difficult to move the camera but it has to be close to the fiber. Alderman Forbes asks if the cameras will be moved if there is an unusual amount of drug activity at the High School. Chief Lyle says there are cameras in use at the Middle School. Mr. Pazos says the High School can also be hooked up.

Chairman Brodeur asks if a police officer can unblock a window if a call comes in that a crime is happening at a certain location. Chief Lyle says no. Chairman Brodeur asks why the recordings will only have a 30 day time frame. Chief Lyle says to make things easy. Chairman Brodeur asks if there will be a problem if the courts want to view a recording of an incident that happened 90 days prior. Chief Lyle says a recording will be kept longer than 30 days only if there is an open investigation. Chairman Brodeur says

cameras would not have been helpful in the recent robbery at the Richdale store because the robber's face was covered. Chief Lyle says if the suspect was in a vehicle, he would not have put a towel over the car's license plate. Chairman Brodeur asks if the cameras at the Middle School are web fed and recorded. Mr. Pazos says the cameras feed the DVR and that is viewed. The cameras do not pan, tilt or zoom. Chairman Brodeur asks who views the recording. Mr. Pazos says Mr. Brow and the Superintendent.

Alderman Seaboyer asks what the distance will be from the pole to the commercial area at Wyoming. Mr. Devitas says that has not been decided. Mr. Pazos says a site survey must be done. Alderman Seaboyer asks if a recorded image would have been of any help in the case of the Richdale robbery. Mr. Pazos says it is part of the pilot program to determine the best site for the camera for capturing those incidents. Mr. Devitas says when the camera is set up there will be a focal point – a "usable video view". But an officer can take control of the camera and zoom in if and when a call is received about criminal activity.

Alderman Infurna says she is delighted that the West Wyoming area is being discussed for the pilot program because she thinks this can help the situation. She is concerned that if the area is not being focused in on that it won't be useful. She asks if there will always be someone stationed at the controls. Chief Lyle says yes, 24/7.

Alderman Forbes asks if it is possible to make an identical copy of a tape. Mr. Devitas says a digital video recorder is used and it can be burned onto a cd.

Alderman Wright asks if the officer dedicated to watching the cameras is also dedicated to answering the phone calls. Chief Lyle says yes, it will be the dispatcher. There will be a 40-inch screen dedicated to the cameras.

Alderman Buonopane asks if the pilot program works if it's possible to tap into this system two years down the road. Mr. Devitas says it has the capability of expansion. Chief Lyle says he asked for an open-ended system to keep adding onto it if the pilot program is successful. Alderman Buonopane asks if the cameras are insured against vandalism. Mr. Devitas says they are placed up high enough that they can't be hit but they could be shot at and that safeguards can be taken if certain areas have more vandalism than others. Alderman Buonopane asks if there is a history of vandalism with the cameras. Mr. Devitas says it depends on the area.

Alderman Tramontozzi asks if he has contracted with other cities and towns. Mr. Devitas says it is a growing trend and that he has contracted with Massport, Everett, Cambridge, Arlington, Revere and Boston. Alderman Tramontozzi asks if the cost of the program is two cameras and a service contract. Mr. Devitas says a service contract is not required. The cameras come with one-year maintenance service. He would love to renew the service contract but the City can go outside. Alderman Tramontozzi asks if service can be handled in-house by the IT department. Mr. Pazos says there is not a lot of maintenance with this.

Alderman Boisselle asks if the expansion in other communities is indicative of a hidden agenda by the federal government to look into communities. Chief Lyle says Homeland

Security is not involved in this in any way. Mr. Devitas says this is a closed network, serving only the City of Melrose.

Alderman Forbes asks if the cameras are top of the line. Mr. Devitas says they will meet the Chief's needs and that they are in the upper echelon.

Alderman Conn says this order is requesting information about the cameras and they have gotten a lot of information. He motions to send the order to the full board with the recommendation to Place on File, 2nd by Alderman Seaboyer.

Chairman Brodeur says he is less comfortable with this order than anyone else, but the order has done what was requested. He is concerned with the effect this will have on the neighbors. He hopes that the lines of communication remain open as the system nears deployment.

On the motion, All in favor.

President Mortimer motions to adjourn, 2nd by Alderman Buonopane. All in favor.

Appropriations adjourns at 7:55 p.m.

Maribeth Harrington
Clerk of Committees