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### Pittsburgh Considers Surveillance Cameras to Combat Rising Crime

County Commissioner of Latino Affairs Group Calls for Public Debate

The Legal Intelligencer  
By Daniel Casciato  
August 15, 2007

While surveillance cameras on city streets sound like good tools for investigations after a crime has been committed, do they really serve as a deterrent or protection for citizens?

The city of Pittsburgh and the Allegheny County District Attorney's Office seem to think so.

In an effort to address the recent wave of violence sweeping the city of Pittsburgh, Mayor Luke Ravenstahl, Chief of Police Nate Harper and the District Attorney's Office are exploring the possibility of adding surveillance cameras to the city's downtown and other high-crime areas.

"The chief and I have had enough," said Ravenstahl. "We're tired of the shootings and we know the community is too. It's time to take back our neighborhoods."

During the mayor's trip to Chicago in the spring, he spent time reviewing the surveillance system there. In the seven months since installing



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the cameras, calls for service relating to narcotics were reduced by 76 percent in the immediate area of where the cameras were used. Additionally, serious crime fell 17 percent and "quality of life" criminal incidents fell 46 percent.

The mayor said that in the next several weeks his administration will consider the best way to employ the use of surveillance cameras.

Whatever the administration decides, local attorney David I. Gonzalez, Allegheny County commissioner for the Governor's Advisory Commission on Latino Affairs, hopes that there will be a public discussion.

"There has to be some public debate regarding this," he said. "I understand the company line is that we have to deter the crime; that's pretty obvious. But what concerns me about these cameras is how they are going to affect Latinos and African-Americans."

The surveillance network would be installed in three phases.

The initial phase would involve the linking of cameras into a single system that would be centrally monitored. Twenty-eight cameras would be installed on 14 of the city's bridges; four on top of the U.S. Steel Tower, the city's tallest downtown building; and the remaining cameras in Point State Park, the downtown area's top attraction.

The second phase would involve the installation of more cameras downtown, while a third phase would involve the installation of cameras in six-square-block areas of high-crime neighborhoods.

Gonzalez wondered if more affluent neighborhoods would receive the cameras or will the city just target neighborhoods with a higher African-American and Latino population.

"You can be sure that they will put these in the Hill District and East Liberty," he said. "But what is the likelihood of the cameras going up in places like Shadyside where there are actually more personal property crimes?"

The administration wants to put their plan out to bid to security firms and hopes to implement a plan by the end of the year.

The city has also take some extra steps to deter crime such as adding more beat cops to make daily contact with merchants, document activities and conduct regular follow-up. K-9 officers will also join this effort. The officers on foot patrol will carry beepers so merchants can contact them.

"The Pittsburgh Bureau of Police realizes the importance of foot patrols in neighborhoods, especially neighborhood business districts," said Ravenstahl. "This increased police visibility is designed to complement the ongoing park and walks."

"In addition, we will beef up our police presence in high crime areas and saturate the neighborhoods with bike patrol," added Harper. "In order to stop the cycle of violence, we must eliminate the target."

Gonzalez still remains concerned, but doubts that anything could be done, including a legal challenge.

"There probably could be a legal challenge, but there's already precedent in other cities," he said. "You could argue that it's a privacy issue and we have an expectation to privacy, but it has to be reasonable. I don't see how a legal challenge would be successful."

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