

The Redevelopment Agency of the
City of Oakland

MEMORANDUM

To: West Oakland Project Area Committee (WOPAC)
From: Patrick Lane
Meeting Date: September 16, 2009

Subject: Security Camera Project Update

Over the last two years, the WOPAC and City staff have been discussing the use of a surveillance camera system as a means to increase security in the West Oakland redevelopment project area. After careful investigation and analyses of a variety of approaches, an integrated security camera system for West Oakland has been determined to be infeasible for three critical reasons: insufficient manpower for monitoring, lack of funding for maintenance and no future sources of funding.

Background

In July 2007, Lt. Berlin of the Oakland Police Department (OPD) addressed a West Oakland Economic Development Working Group meeting sponsored by Councilmember Nancy Nadel, and attended by several WOPAC members. Lt. Berlin proposed the use of a security camera system to monitor trouble spots in West Oakland. The idea was received with interest by those attending the meeting.

At its August 2007 meeting, the WOPAC approved a request made by Lt. Berlin for \$200,000 to purchase security cameras for 11 locations in the West Oakland redevelopment project area. Lt. Berlin's proposal specified a camera model that he and his staff would monitor.

By the end of 2007, concerns in OPD regarding the proposed camera system's technology and monitoring needs were voiced. Because of OPD's changing technology needs, the cameras proposed by Lt. Berlin were deemed infeasible, as they would not fit into new systems being proposed, such as wireless mesh.

A team was created including OPD's Technology Manager and a lieutenant in community policing (Lt. Berlin had since retired), staff from the City's Office of Information Technology, as well as redevelopment staff. The team researched various surveillance technologies, and consulted with other cities regarding their use of security camera systems as a tool for crime reduction. Periodic updates were presented to the WOPAC on the progress of the project.

Proposed System

At the end of a thorough research and planning period, the proposed West Oakland Security Camera Project consisted of 7 high resolution wireless camera units, and other system components to develop a wireless mesh network. The wireless mesh network expands the coverage capability between the surveillance camera units, and streams video images to the OPD Public Administration Building (PAB).

This system was intended as a pilot program in West Oakland. Seven high resolution surveillance cameras were proposed to be installed throughout West Oakland's "hottest" crime spots, as determined by crime statistics for the area. The cameras would not be monitored by OPD, but rather, video images captured by the cameras would be stored in Police Administration Building (PAB) computers for up to two weeks. As crimes in the area are reported, the stored video data could be reviewed by investigators to determine if anything of evidentiary value had been captured.

Surveillance Camera System Constraints

1. While the original investment in equipment and installation would come from redevelopment funds, a source of funding for ongoing maintenance costs (estimated at approximately \$25,000 per year) could not be identified. Redevelopment law prohibits the use of tax increment funding for on-going maintenance costs.
2. With scarce resources, OPD could not commit to monitoring the system, nor to being the repository for the stored video data.
3. Whether they are employed by individual property owners, or as part of a larger network, surveillance camera systems, in general, have not been proven to reduce crime rates, or even to deter criminal activity. The weaknesses of surveillance cameras are numerous; criminal activity may simply move away from a camera's view, equipment is vandalized, darkness prevents meaningful recordings and police staffing costs to monitor the video feeds is prohibitive.

Alternative Steps

During these months of discussions regarding surveillance cameras as a crime prevention tool, representatives of the Oakland Police Department indicated repeatedly that lighting is one of the most effective deterrents to criminal activity.

Currently, staff from CEDA are working to develop area plans to guide future development in the West Oakland redevelopment area. Such plans will include specific recommendations for infrastructure improvements, including sufficient lighting to create a safe environment.

On a smaller, more immediate scale, the creation of a grant program to encourage and assist property owners to install exterior lighting on their buildings may go a lot farther in deterring criminal activity than a security camera program will.

Grants for the installation of surveillance cameras through the NPI (Neighborhood Projects Initiative Program) may continue on an individual basis, but efforts to pursue an area-wide surveillance camera program will be curtailed at this time.

Action Requested Of The PAC

The WOPAC is requested to discuss whether it would like to pursue developing a grant program to support property owners with the installation of exterior lighting on commercial and residential buildings as a means to deter crime and increase a sense of safety in West Oakland neighborhoods.