

License Plate Reading Cameras Proliferate Across Illinois

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(The Center Square) – Cities across the state are either evaluating or have implemented new camera technology that could supplement or replace gunshot spotting systems.

ShotSpotter has cost the city of Chicago \$9 million. Critics say it's not been as effective as advertised. The city has recorded more than 1,000 homicides so far this year.

In Springfield, taxpayers are paying \$644,000 for Shotspotter. Aldermen are now evaluating Flock Safety's license plate cameras.

Company sales representative Dan Murdoch told aldermen this week the cameras are used by agencies across the state, including Joliet, Rantoul, Danville, Decatur and elsewhere, and they can all share information.

"Peoria is putting these in place, the Bloomington-Normal area, they're already in all over the Champaign area, we're in Decatur and if we come here, we'd cover those sort of five central Illinois areas where everyone would be on the same platform," Murdoch said.

Murdoch also said they have shot detection abilities as well, but at an added cost after the first year. The company has anecdotal evidence that installation helps reduce crimes, but does not track such data.

In Springfield, aldermen are poised to approve a two-year contract for 83 cameras at a total cost \$415,000, or \$5,000 each. There's an installation fee per camera of \$250. But, some raised concerns over privacy and potential abuse.

Alderman Ralph Hanauer wanted to ensure the city code prohibits abuse of the data that's intended for law enforcement investigations.

"Obviously I don't want to have directors or councilmen or whoever to have the right to be able to go through that," Hanauer said.

But, the systems aren't just being implemented by police agencies across the state. Murdoch said more than half their business is with the private sector like big-box retailers, homeowners' associations and other places.

"Rivers Casinos just put in a dozen of these cameras," Murdoch said. "Des Plaines has access to those for free."

Murdoch said the systems are also integrated with FBI, Illinois State Police, stolen vehicle databases, Amber or Silver alert lists and other systems.

- Greg Bishop
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