

PROPOSED SECURITY CAMERA INFORMATION SHEET

Tiburon, CA - November 2009

What is the purpose of the cameras?

The cameras would serve two purposes: (1) as a post-crime investigative tool, and (2) as a real-time license-plate alert system in the event of a crime in progress, such as an abduction, a crime under investigation by the Tiburon Police Department, or a similar search for particular plate numbers.

How would the cameras help solve or prevent crime?

The most common property crime occurring in Tiburon is theft, either of vehicles or from vehicles and residences, although occasionally truly heinous crime, like the 2009 murder of a resident at her home, occurs.

- In 2007 there were 97 thefts, 17 burglaries and 10 auto thefts; losses totaled just over \$500,000
- In 2008 there were 99 thefts, 20 burglaries and 2 auto thefts; losses totaled just over \$200,000
- Most of the crimes were committed between midnight and dawn
- The perpetrators identified by police were not residents of the peninsula
- The perpetrators all had extensive criminal histories

The Tiburon Police Department (TPD) believes additional arrests could have been made and future crimes prevented if it had a record of vehicles that coming to or leaving the peninsula proximate to the occurrence of crimes. The most efficient method of creating that record is through a camera system capable of capturing vehicle and license plate images. Technology is available that takes a single, digital color photograph of the back of each passing car. Optical character recognition software “reads” and stores the license plate numbers. A short-retention data base of plate numbers would enable the TPD to look for patterns that match crimes or to search for certain vehicles that might be wanted in connection with particular crimes. The system could be programmed to search for particular license plates including stolen vehicles, those identified in “Amber Alerts” (missing children alerts) or those involved in crimes under investigation by the Tiburon Police.

What does the camera capture?

The camera will take a still photo of the rear of each passing vehicle (as seen in the upper right of the image below). The balance of the screen is what the system would produce based on the type of search is being conducted (specific plate, stolen vehicles, etc.).



The cameras, which are fixed and cannot be remotely operated, would only capture the rear of vehicles, yielding the license plate number and probably color and make of the vehicle. They will not be able to “see” or photograph vehicle occupants.

Where would the cameras be located?

The Tiburon Peninsula has only two roads of ingress and egress: Tiburon Boulevard and Paradise Drive. The cameras would be located on each of those roads near the westernmost border of the Town. A total of six cameras (one for each lane of traffic) would be employed.

Will the system invade privacy?

No. It is well established that one does not have a reasonable expectation of privacy driving a car down a public street such as Tiburon Boulevard. License plates are required to be posted on vehicles precisely so that they can be easily and publicly identified. Anyone can stand by the side of the road and photograph passing traffic. Because the camera will only be photographing the rear of vehicles, it will not create a record of its occupants. Unless one is driving a vehicle that has been identified by the TPD in connection with a crime, his or her plate number will simply be one of thousands captured briefly for review if a subsequent crime investigation so warrants.

Will the system be used for traffic enforcement?

No. It will not have that capability. Only still photographs will be taken and the system will have no method of detecting moving violations such as driving while under the influence or speeding.

Who will govern the use of the system and how long will license plate data be retained?

The Tiburon Town Council will govern use of the system. When this program returns for final consideration, Council will concurrently consider a use policy that sets limits on how long images are retained, who can view them and under what circumstances. We expect the policy to include a short-term schedule for retention, after which all data which is not being used by the TPD on an active investigation would be automatically and permanently discarded. We also expect the policy to reflect a very limited set of uses and purposes for the data, and specify that only the Town Council has the authority to alter the use policy.

What do they cost and who will pay for the cameras?

The cost is not yet certain as system options are still being evaluated, but it is likely to cost between \$135,000 and \$200,000. The cost would be absorbed by three local governments: Tiburon, Belvedere and Marin County (for the unincorporated areas along the north of the peninsula); a portion would be paid through a grant. The projected cost to Tiburon not covered by grants would be between \$45,000 and \$85,000.

Is this a cost-effective use of public resources?

No one can say for certain whether the system will help the TPD capture criminals, but it is likely to provide a very valuable tool to develop leads for solving crime. We do know that using an officer to watch for vehicles, as is necessary from time to time is a very labor intensive use of our police resources and takes officers away from other duties. In the event of a heinous crime, like a child abducted from a school, it could prove life-saving if even a partial license plate were identified by a witness or a search of license plates entering or leaving the peninsula proximate to the crime produced valuable leads in a time-critical manner.

Will the information be available to the public?

No, it will not be made available to the public. Information will only be released pursuant to a court order or subpoena.

Who should I call if I have questions?

TPD Chief Michael Cronin may be contacted at mcronin@ci.tiburon.ca.us or 789-2807 to answer questions.