



Cambridge City Council Votes Unanimously to Oppose Surveillance Cameras

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BOSTON -- In the first move of this kind in the state -- and perhaps the nation -- Cambridge City Council voted 9-0 on February 2, 2009, to oppose the installation in the city of eight surveillance cameras. The cameras were intended to form part of a network funded with a \$4.6 million Department of Homeland Security grant linking Cambridge and eight other Greater Boston communities.

The Council took this action after two sessions during which Councilors sought to learn more about a secretive grant process that was four to six years in the making. They also heard testimony from dozens of Cambridge residents who feared the cameras could violate their First Amendment and privacy rights.

"The Councilors were rightly concerned that they had been kept in the dark about the cameras for four years or more," said Cambridge resident Nancy Murray, the Director of Education at the American Civil Liberties Union of Massachusetts. "And even after a briefing from the Police Commissioner and Fire Chief on January 22, they did not get answers to basic questions. What agencies would have access to the camera's digital images? Where would they be stored and for how long? Would they be transmitted to the Commonwealth Fusion Center? What guarantees would residents have that they would not be used for purposes other than the stated one of traffic control?"

After the Cambridge Chronicle broke the story on August 13, 2008 about a plan to install the camera network in Cambridge, Somerville, Brookline and other Greater Boston communities, Cambridge City Councilor Marjorie Decker approached the ACLU of Massachusetts with her concerns about the DHS grant. The ACLU created educational materials and organized a public meeting in Cambridge on November 20, 2008, to inform residents about the technological capacity and potential use and abuse of the web of surveillance cameras and fusion centers that has been erected across the country in the name of "fighting terrorism."

In Brookline, where residents also mounted a vigorous opposition to the cameras with the help of the ACLU, the Board of Selectmen voted 3-2 in mid January to give them a one-year trial. The Cambridge Council vote could encourage camera opponents in Brookline to take their battle to the Town Meeting in the spring.

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