



Brookline Rejects Homeland Security Surveillance Cameras

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BROOKLINE -- The Brookline Town Meeting voted late last night to adopt a resolution against the use of police surveillance cameras provided by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). The resolution calls on the Board of Selectmen to halt a one-year trial use of the cameras and to take them down.

This is the first time that a town meeting -- an institution of local New England democratic government, with more than two hundred members -- has debated and rejected government surveillance cameras in a town's public spaces. Brookline now joins Cambridge, where the City Council voted 9-0 in February to oppose the installation of eight surveillance cameras obtained with the same DHS grant.

"We are grateful to town meeting members in Brookline who understood that a message needed to be sent, that America should not be a place where the government is watching us as we go about our activities in public," said Sarah Wunsch, a Brookline resident and staff attorney for the American Civil Liberties Union of Massachusetts. The ACLU worked with Brookline PAX and concerned residents to educate the community about the increasing government surveillance of lawful activities and the creation of government databases on vast numbers of Americans.

State Representative Frank Smizik of Brookline spoke in favor of the resolution at Town Meeting, saying that "Brookline has always been a leader" and that this was a time when that leadership was needed to protect our values as a free society.

The Town Meeting vote followed months of public hearings and debates, with many residents objecting to the town's acceptance of the Bush administration's offer of millions of dollars for digital interlinked cameras to watch our public places. Although the cameras were justified by town officials as "free" and as needed to help with evacuations, prevent crime or terrorism, or aid in prosecutions, studies provide no evidence that the cameras are effective. Rather, improved lighting and community policing have been shown effective in preventing and solving crime.

The cameras were intended to form part of a network funded with a \$4.6 million Department of Homeland Security grant linking nine Greater Boston communities.

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