

111 Sunnyside Avenue  
Arlington, MA 02474  
January 31, 2017

**Board of Selectmen**

730 Mass. Ave.  
Arlington, MA 02476

Dear Board of Selectmen,

This statement is in regards to the warrant article “to establish a group to study the use of surveillance technologies”. I would like to explain my motivations for proposing this article, and why I believe it’s important for the town to start thinking about surveillance technologies from a policy perspective. My motivations fall into three categories: (1) ordinances passed, or under consideration by other municipalities, (2) surveillance camera deployments by the Arlington Housing Authority (particularly those which occurred on or around December 2016), and (3) studies of CCTV deployments, conducted in the UK and the United States.

**(1) Ordinances passed, or under consideration by other municipalities**

I attended a the 11/26/2016 meeting of the Cambridge City Council, where the council considered POR 2016-310, “An Act to Promote Transparency and Protect Civil Rights and Civil Liberties With Respect to Surveillance Technology”. The city council voted 7–0 in favor of the Act, referring it to the city’s ordinance committee for transcription. As I understand, this is a starting point for negotiations between the City Council and Cambridge Police, regarding city use of surveillance technologies.

The Cambridge Act proposes several things: (1) it would require public hearings before the acquisition or use of surveillance technologies; (2) it would require city agencies to develop usage policies for surveillance equipment; (3) it would require city agencies to submit surveillance impact reports, to assess impacts on civil liberties, civil rights, and cost; (4) it would require annual reporting of how said surveillance technologies were used; and (5) it specifies penalties for violation of the Act.

Santa Clara’s Finance and Government Operations Committee (FGOC) passed a similar ordinance in 2016. The Santa Clara ordinance uses different language but proposes many of the of the same things: requirements for public input, written policies, a determination that benefits outweigh costs and concerns, and annual reporting.

While the language of these ordinances might not be appropriate for the Town (and may not be viable under Arlington's Town Manager Act), I do believe that the broad policy objectives are worth thinking about. Namely, the requirements for public input, the drafting of clear and publicly available usage policies, and periodic reporting to ensure that that actual use of these technologies remains consistent with the purported use.

## **(2) Surveillance Camera Deployments by the Arlington Housing Authority**

During December 2016 (or thereabouts), the Arlington Housing Authority (AHA) installed fifteen surveillance cameras in and around a block of Precinct 1, bordered by Sunnyside Avenue, Memorial Way, and Gardner Street. Twelve of these cameras were installed directly on AHA property; one was installed on a light pole in the street right of way in front of 2-4 Memorial way; and two were installed across the street from AHA property, on a utility pole in front of 115 Sunnyside Ave. Collectively, these cameras capture views of AHA property and surrounding public ways. For example, residents of the northern block of Sunnyside Ave were filmed each time they came from or went to their homes. These cameras were installed without notice, and without public input.

During late December, I visited each of AHA's properties – Drake Village, Chestnut Manor, Cussack Terrace, Winslow Towers, and Menotomy Manor – to inventory their outdoor surveillance cameras. I counted 74 cameras at the time, indicating that the density of 15 cameras/block is not unusual for the AHA. By comparison, the Arlington Public Safety Building on Mystic Street has eight outdoor cameras.

After negotiations, AHA agreed to remove the two cameras on Sunnyside Ave, and did so on Tuesday Jan. 19th.

The Arlington Housing Authority provides affordable housing to Arlington residents, which is important, crucial work for our community, and they were willing to listen to my neighborhood's concerns regarding the new camera installations. However, I do find their use of surveillance cameras disproportionate and concerning.

## **(3) Studies of CCTV deployments**

In my discussions with AHA staff and board of directors, I was told that the cameras were to protect AHA property, to keep the neighborhood safe, and to prevent crime. This led me to ask the question "How effective are surveillance cameras at preventing crime?". I presumed there was a body of research in this area, and sought out studies of CCTV programs, beginning with the UK.

Hawkeye – a system of 646 cameras in 60 London parking facilities – is arguably the UK’s success story for CCTV. The target area saw a 73% reduction in vehicle crime, compared to a 10% reduction in the control area. However, the success of Hawkeye cannot be attributed to cameras alone: the camera installations were accompanied by confounding factors such as improved lighting and fencing. Therefore, the improvements are the combined effects of a multi-faceted program, rather than the individual effects of any single factor.<sup>1</sup>

Other CCTV programs in the UK produced less positive, and/or less conclusive results. Most failed to achieve a statistically significant reduction in crime rates, and in some cases, crime rates went up (albeit by a statistically insignificant amount). A 2005 Home Office report concluded:

It would be easy to conclude from the information presented in this report that CCTV is not effective: the majority of the schemes evaluated did not reduce crime and even where there was a reduction this was mostly not due to CCTV; nor did CCTV schemes make people feel safer, much less change their behavior. That, however, would be too simplistic a conclusion, and for several reasons.<sup>2</sup>

This general conclusion is echoed by a 2008 Study of San Francisco’s Community Safety Camera program. Here, researchers found “no evidence of an impact of the Community Safety Cameras on violent crime”<sup>3</sup> and “no evidence of any effect of the cameras on drug incidents, or on prostitution, vandalism, and incidences described as suspicious occurrences”<sup>4</sup>. The authors did, however, find “statistically significant and substantial declines in property crime” within 100 feet of camera locations.<sup>5</sup>

The San Francisco study took a critical view of the program’s managerial aspects, and even suggested that the program be discontinued if these shortcomings were not addressed.<sup>6</sup> This was one of the more enlightening parts of the report. Modern surveillance camera systems are large information technology projects, complete with all the pitfalls and entanglements that large IT projects have to offer. There are

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<sup>1</sup> *The Impact of CCTV: Fourteen Case Studies*. Home office Online Report 15/05. Martin Gil, et al. pg. 6–8

<sup>2</sup> *Assessing the Impact of CCTV*. Home Office Research Study 292. Martin Gil and Angela Spriggs. 2005. pg. 115

<sup>3</sup> *The San Francisco Community Safety Camera Program*. Study by the UC Berkeley Center for Information Technology Research in the Interest of Society. Jennifer King, et al. 2008. pg. 11

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.* pg. 12

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.* pg. 11

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.* pg. 144

technical challenges, resource challenges, and process challenges. One cannot simply plug in a couple of cameras and expect miracles to happen.

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In conclusion, I have proposed the surveillance study article for a variety of reasons: privacy and civil liberties, policies surrounding the use of surveillance technologies, program management, and fitness for purpose (i.e., where surveillance technologies like CCTV are used, are they the most effective means of solving the problem at hand?). As these technologies become cheaper and easier to acquire, I would like to see the town examine some of these issues, and consider policies that might be appropriate.

This statement cites several background resources, which I've collected at [https://www.srevilak.net/wiki/Local\\_Surveillance\\_Ordinances](https://www.srevilak.net/wiki/Local_Surveillance_Ordinances). I invite members of the board to examine this material for themselves, if they desire to do so.

Sincerely,

Stephen A. Revilak