

State College council approves \$450,000 contract for video surveillance cameras

Published: October 22, 2013



A video surveillance camera monitors the Beaver Ave. and Hiester Street intersection. The State College borough council has approved a \$450,000 contract for about 90 video surveillance cameras for the downtown area. NABIL K. MARK — CDT photo | [Buy Photo](#)



By Jessica VanderKolk — jvanderk@centredaily.com

STATE COLLEGE — Privacy and cost concerns prompted [Borough](#) Council discussion on Monday of a \$450,000 contract to expand the downtown video surveillance camera system.

But those didn't stop the council from approving it 6-1. Councilman Jim Rosenberger opposed, based on the nearly \$5,000-per-camera cost, including three years of maintenance.

"I'd rather spend money on two more officers on bicycles," he said. "I'm concerned about our budget three years from now."

The project is for installation of about 90 cameras, consolidating the borough's current three video systems into one and adding a wireless infrastructure, as well as the three years of maintenance.

Negotiating the contract with [CelPlan Technologies Inc.](#), of Reston, Va., now will get more specific between the company and the borough related to the exact number of cameras, type of cameras and mounting locations.

General locations are part of a downtown map developed with borough police. It shows existing cameras at Calder Way and McAllister Alley, Hiester Street and Beaver Avenue, and Locust Lane and Beaver.

Proposed locations are at the intersections of College and Beaver avenues with Atherton Street and throughout the downtown core — the 100 block of South Allen Street, Calder Way between Allen and Garner streets, Beaver Avenue between Allen and Garner, South Pugh Street, McAllister Alley between Calder and Beaver, Hiester between College and Beaver, and the area of Sowers Street and College Avenue to Garner.

That's in addition to cameras in the municipal building and three parking garages.

The map also shows proposed neighborhood camera locations, creating a rectangle with Garner Street, East Prospect Avenue, Pugh and East Foster Avenue.

There is no approved budget for neighborhood cameras, but the option exists for the future and the borough requested that bidding vendors include costs to extend the project in that way.

CelPlan's price was \$11,000 per camera unit. Borough project manager Hillary Pasch said that those cameras are self-contained and it would be easy to decide how many units to purchase.

"Everything is included," added IT Director Angel Hernandez. "So it could have local storage, a data card and just the enclosure to keep all of that safe, rather than a weatherproof camera and a wireless radio."

He said that the trees and lighting in the neighborhoods add to the need for the more expensive, self-contained cameras.

Rosenberger asked why the borough cameras came in at a price so much higher than that for Penn State. The [university is installing 450 security cameras](#) in dorms and common buildings at a cost of about \$3,000 per unit.

Hernandez pointed out that the borough's cost includes three years of maintenance, and that the two systems are fundamentally different.

“One of the advantages Penn State has is they have infrastructure at all of those buildings,” he said. “We’re looking at putting them in places where we have to transmit them wirelessly, and that does contribute to the cost. It’s just a different level of equipment.”

Councilman Peter Morris raised privacy and access concerns, asking who has the right to view the videos and how long the files are stored.

Pasch explained that access to the cameras are based on permissions. Parking Manager Charles DeBow, for example, could be set up to view the parking garage cameras.

“There’ll be groups set up with different abilities,” Hernandez added. “It’s not going to be open for anybody who goes to a specific website.”

Manager Tom Fontaine added that there is a borough policy related to cameras and any amendments to that would come before the council.

Pasch also explained that vendors were required to meet a 30-day retention period for camera files, which also is the borough's standard retention of those and items like 911 tapes.

“Suppose that the people in the video are personally identifiable,” Morris said. “That seems to me to be the most dangerous type of video, depending on what they’re doing.”

Fontaine pointed out that that’s the purpose of the video — to identify people committing crimes. The areas where cameras are currently mounted include signs stating that people are subject to video surveillance.

But Morris was concerned about those caught on camera doing something embarrassing.

“If they’re identifiable, it should be very, very clear ... that that sort of video never gets out, never shows up on YouTube,” he said. “If anything like that ever happens, I would vote to remove the cameras completely.”

Jessica VanderKolk can be reached at 235-3910. Follow her on Twitter [@jVanReporter](#).

Read more here: <http://www.centredaily.com/2013/10/22/3850328/state-college-council-approves.html#storylink=cpy>