



# REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

OFFICE OF CITY AUDITOR – SEATTLE

October 26, 2009

## Cal Anderson Park Surveillance Camera Pilot Program Evaluation

### Audit Background

From January through February 2008, the City of Seattle installed three surveillance cameras in Capitol Hill's Cal Anderson Park. In June 2008, the Seattle City Council adopted an ordinance that created the Surveillance Camera Pilot Program and established controls over the cameras' use.

### Audit Objectives

The ordinance governing the pilot program requires that the City Auditor conduct a program evaluation to address:

- Departmental compliance with the policies of the ordinance;
- The effect of the cameras on crime deterrence;
- The effect of the cameras on crime detection and investigation; and
- The effect of the cameras on the public perception of safety.

This program evaluation is intended to help the Seattle City Council decide whether to grant additional authority to the Department of Parks and Recreation, the Seattle Police Department, and the Department of Information Technology to operate surveillance cameras in Cal Anderson Park, or to install surveillance cameras in other City parks (SMC 18.14.030).

### Findings

**Departmental Compliance** – Each department involved with the pilot program complied with its policies, with one exception: the Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) had the technical capability to access the surveillance cameras' pan, tilt, and zoom (PTZ) controls, which was prohibited by ordinance. According to the Department of Information Technology (DoIT), DoIT recently disabled DPR's PTZ controls to comply fully with the ordinance.



Surveillance Camera in Cal Anderson Park

**Crime Deterrence** – We were unable to determine whether the surveillance cameras in Cal Anderson Park had a deterrent effect on crime due to data limitations and a time frame, restricted by ordinance requirements, which limited our scope to three months of data.

**Crime Detection and Investigation** – SPD's first use of the cameras to investigate a crime was in August 2009 following reports of roving gangs in Cal Anderson Park.

**Public Perception of Safety** – Our survey's methodology limitations prevented us from confidently generalizing its results beyond our pool of respondents. The surveillance cameras in Cal Anderson Park appear to have had a minimal effect on our survey respondents' perception of safety in the park, which was dependent upon their awareness of the presence of the cameras. We found that less than one-third of the 103 respondents to the survey we conducted in Cal Anderson Park claimed to know about the cameras. Of those who knew about the cameras, only about four percent claimed that the cameras affected their perception of safety in the park. We were unable to determine whether this effect on respondents' perception of safety is sufficient for the purposes of the pilot program, due to the program's lack of clear goals, specific performance measures, and defined benchmarks to determine program success or failure.

### Recommendations

We made nine recommendations to improve the City's ability to evaluate the Surveillance Camera Pilot Program, to increase the effectiveness of the cameras, and to improve departmental compliance with the requirements of Ordinance 122705.

A copy of the Office of City Auditor's full report can be obtained at the Auditor's website at <http://seattle.gov/audit> or by calling (206) 233-3801. Please direct any questions or comments regarding this report, or suggestions for future audits to David G. Jones, Acting Seattle City Auditor, at (206) 233-3801 or [davidg.jones@seattle.gov](mailto:davidg.jones@seattle.gov)

## Departmental Compliance

If the Seattle City government (the City) wants to fully comply with Chapter 18.14 of the Seattle Municipal Code (SMC), which authorizes the Surveillance Camera Pilot Program, the following recommendations should be implemented:

**Recommendation 1:** To aid program oversight, The Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR), the Department of Information Technology (DoIT), and the Seattle Police Department (SPD), should amend their log books to include a place where the user may record the name, title, and signature of the authorizing supervisor as one of the personnel whose involvement is required for using the cameras or viewing camera footage. According to DPR they have made changes to comply with this recommendation. Also, the City should consider clarifying SMC 18.14.090 to indicate that the authorizing supervisor is among the “personnel involved,” whose name and title must appear in the log book entries.

**Recommendation 2:** To help prevent future confusion about City department responsibilities in implementing the Surveillance Camera Pilot Program, the City should consider revising Section 2 of Ordinance 122705 by replacing the reference to the “City Clerk” with the “City Auditor.”

## Crime Deterrence, Detection and Investigation

If the City wants to understand the effect of the cameras on crime deterrence:

**Recommendation 3:** The City should: (a) develop a more valid and geographically specific incident reporting method than it currently uses, (b) install cameras in places where they may be both visible and able to record images throughout each park, and (c) select parks that are easily compared to one another in terms of characteristics that are relevant to the implementation of the program (e.g., camera positions and visibilities, crime trends, park user demographics, landscapes, etc.).

**Recommendation 4:** The City should improve the method by which it records and retains park exclusion notices, which prohibit people caught committing violations of City ordinances from entering a park for a year. DPR has indicated they agree with this recommendation and will work with SPD on recordkeeping and retention issues.

**Recommendation 5:** If the City wishes to assess the effectiveness of the surveillance cameras in assisting SPD in detecting and investigating crimes, then it should authorize another evaluation of the Surveillance Camera Pilot Program after at least one year from the time SPD employees completed their training on the cameras. This should give SPD enough time to make more of its employees aware of the cameras, and to use the cameras to detect and investigate crimes.

## Public Perception of Safety

If the City wants to maximize the public’s perception of safety and measure the cameras’ effect on that perception:

**Recommendation 6:** The City should increase public awareness of the surveillance cameras in City parks by installing more visible signs and periodically engaging in publicity campaigns.

**Recommendation 7:** The City should consider modifying the Seattle Municipal Code to authorize SPD personnel to view the live surveillance footage more frequently, while balancing public safety concerns against privacy concerns.

**Recommendation 8:** The City should establish clear program goals, specific performance measures, and defined benchmarks to determine program success or failure. Definitions of success or failure should address expected or desired levels of change in the areas of crime deterrence, crime-solving, and perception of public safety.

**Recommendation 9:** To inform its decision about whether to continue using surveillance cameras in parks, the City should consider: (a) authorizing and funding a more extensive survey to evaluate the effect of the surveillance cameras on park users’ perception of public safety; (b) seek further public comment on the presence of the cameras in Cal Anderson Park by requiring DPR to hold one or more public hearings in Cal Anderson Park; and (c) using the public comments DPR will receive as it convenes community meetings in other parks per SMC 18.14.040.B to inform the decision about whether to install cameras in yet more parks.