

Somerville Surveillance Cameras Talking Points

- The seven surveillance cameras purchased for Somerville are part of a “**Urban Area Security Initiative**” grant worth \$4.6 million from the US Department of Homeland Security.
- The camera network **linking Somerville and 8 other Greater Boston communities** (including Brookline and Cambridge) will reportedly be run out of the Office of Emergency Preparedness in Boston. Somerville will thus be incorporated into a rapidly growing network of surveillance cameras across the country funded by the DHS in the name of “fighting terrorism.” Even Liberty, Kansas – population 95, now has a DHS-funded surveillance camera.
- Questions: Who will have **access** to the digital images? Will the digital images be **shared** – if so, with what agencies and on what terms? Where will they be **stored** and for how long? Will the DHS’ bureau of **Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE)** have access to the images? Will they, like so much other public and private data be transmitted to the secretive **Commonwealth Fusion Center** and possibly be used for data mining purposes? The Fusion Center in Maynard, Massachusetts is now one of 66 Fusion Centers in the country which are emerging as hubs of a new domestic intelligence apparatus that collects information about crime, everyday activities, personal relationships, and tips from the public about suspicious activity, and uses data mining techniques to identify individuals for closer scrutiny, all without any independent oversight.
- These questions about the collection, storage, sharing and use of data raise serious concerns about **privacy**, the surveillance of lawful First Amendment activity, and the nature of a free society. Given the power of these cameras, they radically change the notion of people giving up their privacy in public spaces. Twenty-four-hours a day monitoring of public spaces gives the government a vast quantity of information on private citizens that would otherwise be unavailable. This kind of monitoring **chills speech** and associational activity by preventing people from remaining anonymous.
- Existing studies show how **easily the cameras can be abused**. In Britain, police officers assigned to monitor surveillance cameras ended up using them to zoom in on women’s body parts and even stalk women. They have also been used to target and track people of color. Their round-the-clock monitoring can make immigrants in our community feel even more vulnerable.
- The potential for cameras to be used for **racial or religious profiling** is especially worrying given new FBI guidelines that permit agents to track people based on their race and ethnicity, without the standard of “suspicion” required by the Fourth Amendment.
- The potential for powerful surveillance cameras to someday be **fitted with facial recognition software**, eye scans, radio frequency identification tags and other forms of software and connected to large law enforcement databases could make them a critical pillar of a growing surveillance infrastructure.
- Existing evidence shows that surveillance cameras are not effective in **preventing crime** in a community. For instance, according to a study in San Francisco, which has spent \$700,000 for the purchase and maintenance of cameras, there is “no evidence” that

they curtailed violent crime. Funds used to maintain the cameras would be better spent on improving street lighting or community policing. A Glasgow study shows that the cameras “appeared to have little effect on the **clearance rates for crimes** and offenses generally.” In Cincinnati police have said “We’ve never really gotten anything useful from them...we’ve never had a successful prosecution...we’re trying to use money for other things.”

- Although the cameras were purchased through a grant, it will be **expensive to maintain them**. In Brookline, it will cost at least \$15,000 a year.
- Cambridge City Council has voted unanimously to **reject** its surveillance cameras. In Brookline, the selectmen voted 3-2 to give them a year’s trial. Residents are now organizing to take a warrant article against the cameras to the spring Town Meeting.
- Somerville should be a place where immigrants feel welcome, where diversity and First Amendment activity can thrive and where privacy rights are respected.