

WHY BROOKLINE SHOULD REJECT THE DHS/POLICE SURVEILLANCE CAMERAS

Support Article 25 on the 2009 Town Meeting Warrant

Last January, by a 3-2 vote, the Brookline Selectmen approved a one-year trial period for a system of 12 powerful digital surveillance cameras covering public places in Brookline. Funded initially by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS), the Brookline cameras, with their ability to pan, tilt and zoom, are linked in a live two-way network to eight other cities and towns.

Around the same time, the Cambridge City Council, by a 9-0 vote, rejected the use of similar cameras in that city. **Article 25 of the 2009 Warrant** calls on Town Meeting to join Cambridge in saying no to unjustified 24-hour camera surveillance of Brookline residents as we go about our daily activities in public spaces, especially when there are other methods, like improved lighting and community policing, that have been shown to be much more effective in preventing crime.

What's wrong with police cameras watching us in public places?

Lots of private businesses use them, right? There's a big difference between private businesses using cameras at their own locations and the creation of a government infrastructure for surveillance of the law-abiding, with the capacity to store and share digital files with other government agencies



which are creating huge databases. Also, the digital images from the government cameras, unlike private cameras, will be available, with few exceptions, to anyone who makes a request under the state's Public Records Law. Elsewhere, images from police cameras have ended up on websites like YouTube.

Aren't these cameras just another tool for the police to help keep us safe?

Studies uniformly show that general police surveillance cameras don't make us safer. They don't prevent terrorism or most crimes, and don't even increase the rate at which the police solve crimes. In Brookline, we were told the cameras would help in case of evacuation from Boston. There is no evidence that having these cameras would make any difference for traffic flow. More likely, we will see "mission creep," with the cameras being made more powerful and invasive with the addition of software for recognizing people

or tracking allegedly unusual or suspicious behavior.

Cars keep getting broken into in my neighborhood; won't these cameras help find out who is doing that?

Article 25 would not interfere with the police using cameras in particular locations for short periods of time to help stop crime. It would also not prevent the use of cameras in highly sensitive locations. Article 25 only prevents the permanent use of general DHS/police surveillance cameras, regardless of the need.

What's wrong with a twelve-month trial period? Why not let the oversight committee report on whether they are useful?

Many scientifically conducted studies have already been done and come to the same conclusions. In one year, the Selectmen's Oversight Committee on cameras, with volunteer members who are not trained to conduct such a study, will be unable to come to valid conclusions about the effectiveness of the cameras. Nor will they be able to measure the effect of such a camera system on our sense of living in a free society. The trial period is a waste of time and taxpayer dollars.

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If the camera system is free, what's the harm?

DHS has given Brookline \$150,000 for initial installation and \$15,000 for the first year of estimated costs. This funding does not cover the large amounts of time spent by town employees, including police and others in setting up and running the system, training, and responding to public records requests or requests from other government agencies. Nor does it include the cost to our sense of freedom.

Doesn't the policy controlling use of the cameras protect against abuses that have occurred elsewhere?

Adopting a policy on use of the cameras does not answer the initial question of whether these cameras are justified to begin with. With all the studies showing no effect in preventing crime or terrorism, there is no reason to have a camera system like this. And abuses have taken place despite the existence of good policies. For those who have been targeted for surveillance because of their race, gender, or lawful political activity, or women victims of domestic violence tracked by their abuser who has access to the system, the possibility of discipline for violating the policy doesn't remedy the wrong done.

We are asking Town Meeting Members to Vote in Support of Article 25.

Article 25 is a resolution expressing the views of Brookline residents who do not want to walk blindly into a surveillance society. We believe it is important for the Town of Brookline to join the City of Cambridge in speaking out against the installation of a DHS-funded surveillance camera system which will not make us more safe, just less free.

We should remember the words of Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas: "The privacy and dignity of our citizens are being whittled away by sometimes imperceptible steps. Taken individually, each step may be of little consequence. But when viewed as a whole, there begins to emerge a society quite unlike any we have seen."

We need to take a stand in favor of our fundamental values. Please vote for Article 25!



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Brookline Committtee to Stop the Cameras

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The Stop the Cameras Campaign is endorsed by Brookline PAX and the ACLU of Massachusetts.