

## **Northfield Police Department Body Worn Camera Program**

### **City Council information for work session February 9, 2021**

#### **Overview**

The Northfield Police Department has been exploring the implementation of a body worn camera (BWC) program for several years. In prior years information has been shared with the city council about the program and the costs associated with it. The most recent information was shared during the 2021 budget process in 2020. A copy of the memo given to the council during that discussion item is included in the materials supplied for this work session discussion. The 2021 budget was approved with the addition of body cameras.

As part of the process, Minnesota statute 626.8473 subd. 2. Requires

*“That a local law enforcement agency must provide an opportunity for public comment before it purchases or implements a portable recording system. At a minimum, the agency must accept public comments submitted electronically or by mail, and the governing body with jurisdiction over the budget of the law enforcement agency must provide an opportunity for public comment at a regularly scheduled meeting.”*

The March 2, 2021 council meeting will have a regular agenda item for the public to provide comment. As part of the agenda packet the police department policy on body work cameras will be published and available. The department policy is in compliance with state law and has been reviewed by the Police Policy Task Force, and it is included with the materials for this work session item as well.

#### **Reasoning for a BWC Program**

Over the past year Police Chief Mark Elliott has had the opportunity to discuss body worn cameras for the Northfield police officers in a wide variety of community forums. There has been overwhelming support for the department to use body worn cameras. In fact, many citizens are surprised that the department does not already use them as the majority of police departments have implemented the use of them. The use of body worn cameras by departments in Minnesota has grown exponentially each year following the passage of state legislation in 2016 that put many requirements on departments using them and also safeguarded the privacy of people having interactions with the police through updates to the data practices law.

All of the local peer communities have police departments that use body worn cameras including, Farmington, Rosemount, Hastings, Red Wing, and Faribault. The Dakota and Rice County Sheriff's Departments also use them. Just this past year Illinois passed legislation requiring all police departments to use them and so did New Jersey.

The reasons for using the Body worn camera technology are many. Included among them is the ability to monitor officers in their work. A federal monitor overseeing the New York Police Department recently said that Police Body Cameras (are a) “Powerful Tool” Against Abuses.

*The New York Times (11/30, Southall) reports, “Police body cameras can help reduce the kind of bogus stops that have fueled accusations of racial bias and harassment against police officers in New York City, according to a long-awaited report released Monday.” The Times adds, “Officers who wore the devices reported almost 40 percent more stops than officers who did not, the report found, suggesting that body cameras could compel officers to provide a more accurate accounting of their pedestrian stops under the department policy known as stop-and-frisk.”*

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*Peter Zimroth, “the federal monitor who prepared the report and is guiding changes to the stop-and-frisk policy, attributed the increase in documented stops to officers being more inclined to record their actions on official paperwork knowing that they were recorded and could be reviewed. Underreporting has hindered court-ordered reform efforts for years, but the report suggests that the cameras are key to understanding the scope of the problem and fixing it.”*

In Wisconsin, the Green Bay Packers also saw the wisdom in police being equipped with body worn cameras, so much so that the organization bought them for the Green Bay Police Department (Police One. Dec. 16, 2020).

*“As an organization, we are committed to using our platform and providing resources to help achieve racial equity and social justice,” said Packers President/CEO Mark Murphy. “In conversations with our players, community partners and elected officials, we determined that supporting this purchase would complement our many other efforts to address injustices in our communities of color. The cameras will also help the police perform their duties more effectively and benefit the local community. We are proud to be working with Green Bay and Axon to bring this technology to our city in order to enhance public safety and affect meaningful change.”*

*This is the first time a major league sports team has funded police safety technology for their community, according to Axon.*

*“We’re excited to work with the Packers and the Green Bay Police Department to reach one common goal – protecting life,” said Axon CEO and founder Rick Smith in a statement. “It’s inspiring to partner with organizations across industries to make a real change when it comes to racial equity, diversity, and inclusion in our society. Body cameras are a critical component of transparency and performance in law enforcement and we believe this technology can help bridge the relationship between police and communities.”*

### **Northfield BWC Program**

The Northfield police department cameras will primarily be used in the patrol division. Officers will be required to record all enforcement contacts and most citizen contacts that have a potential to become an enforcement contact or adversarial. Officers will have the ability to cease recording for the privacy of persons they deal with in some very limited circumstances, such as some medical calls. All officers including detectives will be required to use them on all search warrants and mental health calls.

The current squad cameras are 6 years old and in need of replacement. The body worn cameras and squad cameras will be replaced into a unified system to ensure compatibility between the two platforms. Recordings will be kept for a reasonable length of time for non-enforcement contacts, and as required by statute on enforcement contacts. Recordings will be kept on a Department of Justice approved cloud storage system to minimize cost and ensure security.

The department will have an independent bi-annual audit of the BWC program as required by Minnesota law.

During the work session Chief Elliott will have a short presentation and will answer any questions councilors have about the program or the upcoming public meeting.