



Legislation Text

File #: 21-134, **Version:** 1

City Council Meeting Date: March 2, 2021

To: Mayor and City Council
City Administrator

From: Mark Elliott, Police Chief

Public Hearing for Public Input on Police Body Worn Camera Program and Equipment Purchase.

Action Requested:

The Northfield City Council should accept public comment on the implementation of a police body worn camera program, followed by a motion to close the public hearing.

Summary Report:

Minnesota State Statute State Statute 626.8473 requires the opportunity for public comment at a city council meeting before purchasing body cameras.

SS 626.8473 s.2 states, 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 City Council should accept public comment during this agenda item.

Background Information:

The Northfield Police Department (NPD) does not currently have any Body Worn Cameras (BWC's). The department has had in-car squad video for many years. This video has been helpful in providing accountability to the community and in meeting the community's expectation of professional police service delivery. The NPD has requested funding for BWC's in the annual budget since 2017, but the request has been pushed back. The funding request has been in the CEP since 2018 and has been listed as a 2021 expected expense. This item was discussed during city council budget discussions in 2020 and approved as part of the 2021 budget. BWC's have been available for over a decade, but have greatly increased in popularity following calls for police reform in 2015. Late in 2015, the *President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing Report*, which is highly regarded by police departments and communities as a best practices guide, recommends the use of BWC's in order to "improve policing practices and build community trust and legitimacy." The report covers the police use of BWC's in Pillar Three: Technology, and says:

"An increasing number of law enforcement agencies are adopting BWC programs as a means to improve evidence collection, to strengthen officer performance and accountability, and to enhance agency transparency. By documenting encounters between police and the public, BWCs can also be used to investigate and resolve complaints about officer-involved incidents."

In a society that expects video and trusts video evidence to confirm written or oral accounts of incidents, it is important that the Northfield Police Department is able to have the ability to deliver on this expectation.

Northfield Police Body Worn Camera Program

The Northfield Police Department proposes purchasing BWC's for the officers to use during their assigned shifts according to the recently issued Portable Audio and Video Records Policy (policy 423) attached to this agenda item. The policy is in compliance with Minnesota's state laws on police use of body worn cameras and data practices laws. The policy was reviewed by the Northfield Police Policy Task Force, and the task force members recommended a BWC program for the police department as well.

The program would require officers to record all enforcement actions and emergency responses they are assigned to while working as highlighted in the policy as follows:

The recorder should be activated in any of the following situations:

- (a) All enforcement and investigative contacts including stops and field interview (FI) situations;*
- (b) Traffic stops including, but not limited to, traffic violations, stranded motorist assistance and all crime interdiction stops;*
- (c) Self-initiated activity in which a member would normally notify Dispatch;*
- (d) Any other contact that becomes adversarial after the initial contact in a situation that would not otherwise require recording.*

The information on body worn cameras has been presented to the council several times over the past three years and was discussed during the 2021 budget process. There is broad public support for a program, as a BWC program meets the broad societal expectations of police transparency and assists in legitimizing the work the officers do while providing oversight as they go about handling their daily calls for service. The use of BWC's are an industry best practice with all local peer agencies using them as well as the security departments of both local colleges.

Alternative Options:

None

Financial Impacts:

The approved police department CEP budget for 2021 includes funding the purchase of body cameras in the amount of \$59,555. Updated prices for 2021 are being sought through multiple vendors and the state bid prices. Costs are expected to be similar to the 2020 quotes received. As each vendor has a different price structure for capital costs and ongoing subscription costs, amounts due each year can vary but prices are expected to average around \$1000/year per officer for body worn cameras based on a five year plan and replacement schedule. Funding for the capital purchase is in the 2021 Capital Equipment Plan from the Insurance Fund as this is a risk reduction tool.

Body Camera Staff Related Considerations: The police department expects the addition of body cameras to increase the staff needs in the Evidence Section. The 2019 police department staffing study completed by Novak and Associates recommended the addition of a part to full-time civilian position to assist the Property and Evidence Technician in 2022 to handle the increased data handling requirements of the body worn cameras, as well as keeping up with other evidence items and assisting both the records and CSO position with support duties that are currently exceeding staff capacity. Through the feedback from the Police Policy Task Force and police reform related requests there is an increased demand for statistical data and requests for transparency from the public on police information. In order to meet all of these needs, there will be a request from the police department to add a civilian support position in the 2022 budget at a cost of approximately \$77,000.

Tentative Timelines:

March 2, 2021 accept public comment. Update product quotes and order cameras in March. Work with IT on an installation and implementation schedule in April. Start using cameras in July, subject to product delivery and installation availability.