

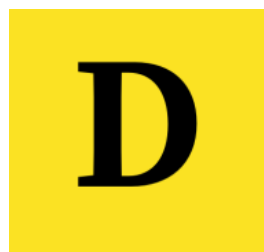


DOCUMENTERS

# Residents don't trust police with license plate surveillance



by Lynelle Herndon, Noah Kincade and Malak Silmi  
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## Detroit Documenters

People-powered news on your local government,  
published by Outlier Media.

Hey Hey, Detroit!

Since the beginning, Detroit Documenters have noticed that written records don't always reflect what public officials have said. That's why we've made an effort to provide a more complete record, so we can interpret what actually happened for ourselves.

Last week, we listened to the Detroit Police Department's reasoning for proposing more license plate readers to assist surveillance in very specific ways. Yet, the department's own report cites wider authorization for the technology.

Similarly, vague language is used to describe conditions for a new "tiny home" shelter development, as city councilmembers try to decipher what it means to have communal facilities. Despite concerns about whether a developer can afford to adhere to zoning requirements, zoning amendments were approved.

We use this newsletter to shine a light on inconsistencies like these. But it's evident that Detroiters need more insight and analysis. With residents speaking out, Detroit Documenters monitoring, media partners reporting, and readers sharing what they learn, we can hold our local government officials accountable — together.

Keep the accountability going with our new newsletter **Streetlight Detroit**, where we'll pay even closer attention to safety and policing in the city, with our updates from the Board of Police Commissioners, in-depth local reporting and much more. **Sign up now** — the first issue drops Friday.

**“I think grown folks should be able to do what grown folks do as long as it's not illegal and hurting anybody else.”**

*—James Tate, president pro tem of Detroit City Council, explaining why he hesitates to support a ban on flavored tobacco products or vapes*

## **The Scoop**

### ***DPD wants more license plate recognition cameras, but residents don't trust the technology***

Thursday's Board of Police Commissioners meeting featured a one-sided public hearing on the proposed \$5 million purchase of license plate recognition (LPR) cameras for the Detroit Police Department (DPD). Only DPD was invited to present and take questions, and public commenters were limited to just two minutes each to rebut the department's claims. DPD promised that license plate readers will only be used to find stolen vehicles. But the **Surveillance Technology Specification Report** and the contract submitted to City Council indicate a much broader array of uses are possible.

DPD Deputy Chief Franklin Hayes said the department already has 83 LPR cameras in service and wants to purchase 100 more from Motorola Solutions to be stationed at intersections around the city. “If you're not driving a stolen car,” Hayes said, “this technology won't trigger. It won't even bother you. It won't even affect you.” However, the list of authorized uses stated in DPD's own

report include Amber Alerts, the apprehension of suspects and fugitives, furthering investigations of serious crimes, and “other legitimate law enforcement purposes.”

Since no one opposed to the purchase was invited to speak, it was up to commissioners and the public to rebut DPD’s claims.

Commissioner Willie Burton asked Hayes about the more than 2,000 agencies the department shares the data with, and Hayes said he couldn’t answer because he didn’t know the source of that figure. The **contract with Motorola (see Page 16)** states that DPD will share LPR data with a network of more than 2,000 agencies, which would then enable cameras to detect vehicles from multiple agency “hotlists.”

Commissioner Linda Bernard also expressed concerns about data being shared and said some of the entities listed were banks, repossession services and investigative agencies seeking location logs of individuals driving around Detroit.

Prior to the meeting, residents and advocates protested the expanded use of LPR and opposed increased police surveillance. Speaking to reporters and during public comment, Detroiters said they feared the technology would be used to find people with warrants for minor offenses or unpaid child support, and its use in public places such as parks could lead to diminished use of those spaces.

The contract lays out the full capabilities of **Motorola’s L6Q Quick-Deploy LPR Camera System**, and they exceed the claims that it can only be used to read license plates.

Searches can be conducted based on vehicle make, model, color and body style, and can even look for the presence of racks and bumper stickers. It can also look for partial plate numbers, as may be reported by witnesses at the scene of a crime. And it can identify where a plate has been previously spotted and find other vehicles connected to vehicles of interest to police.

Commissioners Burton and Bernard clearly read the contract and asked some tough questions, but the hearing would have made way for a more balanced

discussion if other voices — particularly those against the technology — were permitted to speak at length rather than limiting them **to public comment**.

*There's still time to share your voice on expanding police use of license plate surveillance. Email your comments to **[bopc@detroitmi.gov](mailto:bopc@detroitmi.gov)**.*

*5/11/2023 Board of Police Commissioners, Evening Community Meeting  
**Documented** by **Dan Ignacio**.*

## City News

### *Transit, Politics*



#### ***TRANSIT:***

Construction has begun on the State Fair Transit Center. **Ideal Contracting LLC** in Southwest Detroit won a bid with the Detroit Building Authority to complete the project. The authority requested an almost \$13 million increase for the project, for a total of almost \$32 million.

Detroit's Executive Director of Transit Mikel Oglesby said the extra funding will help transform the fairgrounds' historic dairy cattle barn into a **major transit center** with Wi-Fi, bike rentals and storage, public bathrooms, retail stores, and

an electric bus charging station. He said the investment at the State Fair Transit Center would pressure the Detroit Department of Transportation to consider similar investments at the Rosa Parks Transit Center.

The committee approved the contract increase and sent it to the full council with a recommendation to approve.

*5/8/2023 Detroit City Council, Public Health and Safety Standing Committee  
**Documented** by **Pamela Taylor and Roseann Micallef.***

### ***POLITICS:***

City Councilmember Scott Benson wants to prohibit the sale of flavored tobacco products — like flavored vapes — in Detroit because they **appeal to young people**. But **state law** prevents local governments from imposing policies on the sale or licensure of tobacco products.

So City Council drafted a **resolution to urge the Michigan Legislature** to repeal Section 14 of the Tobacco Products Tax Act. Public commenters and most councilmembers expressed support for the ban. But Councilmember Coleman Young was concerned about how the law would be enforced. Council President Pro Tem James Tate said that while he supports the city being able to make its own policy decisions, he also supports adults being able to make their own decisions. Rather than banning products, Tate wants to identify how young people are getting their hands on the products. The resolution was approved without objection and with a waiver that prevents the council from reconsidering that decision.

The council also approved **zoning amendments** for **New Path Villages**, a development of small emergency shelters built in the style of tiny homes. Councilmember Mary Waters had concerns about plans for a communal bath with only one shower. Tate said that would not be the case.

“The communal space will be allowable for communal activities, but you won’t have one shower for everybody. It will be a location where the showers will be located,” he said.

City Planning Commission Director Marcell Todd confirmed the zoning approval was conditioned upon sanitation facilities — bathrooms — being provided in each shelter. Waters wanted to know why it was approved without knowing whether New Path Villages had the funding to meet the sanitation requirements. Todd explained the developers needed the approval in order to get the funding. The zoning amendments were approved, 6-2, with Calloway and Waters voting no.

*5/9/2023 Detroit City Council, Formal Session*  
**Documented by Gina McPherson and Kayleigh Lickliter.**

## More Coverage

**(5/8) District 4 Community Advisory Council:** Advisory council considers signing an agreement with Eastside Community Network as it pursues a funding source. It also looks to improve community outreach.

**(5/9) Board of Police Commissioners Policy Committee:** Stop ShotSpotter Coalition presents a case against surveillance technology including gunshot detection and license plate recognition systems.

**(5/10) Detroit Brownfield Redevelopment Authority, Board of Directors:** Redevelopment plans for former Amsterdam Street Cadillac plant and 3200 Tyler Avenue approved and sent to City Council. Hudson's site block plan amended.

## Shoutout

### ***To BridgeDetroit's City Council Notebook***

Shoutout to **Malachi Barrett** and the team at BridgeDetroit for their **City Council Notebook**, a comprehensive newsletter focused squarely on Detroit's legislative body. City Council deserves its own newsletter — one that reports on the many issues that may not make the headlines. If you care about Detroit

politics, **sign up for this free newsletter** delivered to your inbox every Wednesday morning.



## Get Involved

### *Upcoming training and events*

#### **Work for the Documenters Network!**

##### **Applications due May 21**

Are you a community-builder with strong project management and communication skills? City Bureau is searching for its next Documenters Network Coordinator to grow and cultivate relationships with engaged community members. This position is remote. Applications close May 21. **Apply to join the team!**

#### **Detroit Documenters Community of Practice (DCOP)**

##### **May 31, 6-7:30 p.m.**

The DCOP is an opportunity to talk with Documenters, ask questions, share insights and brainstorm ideas. This casual virtual gathering is open to the community — you don't need to have attended a Documenters training. Email us at **documenters@outliermedia.org** if you have announcements to share, a topic to discuss or want to take a leadership role in the workshop. We look forward to hanging out! Register to **join us**.

#### **Office hours**

##### **Tuesdays, 2-4 p.m.**

Drop in to ask questions, pitch ideas, discuss assignments or just hang out. You can even get personalized training on topics like live-tweeting or improving your notes. Visit **our office** or **join our office hours on Zoom**.

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