



NEWS

BY HENRY HOUSTON

BETTER WATCH OUT, BETTER NOT POUT

Downtown surveillance helps the police watch every breath you take — if they want to

I'm sitting in Eugene police Lt. Doug Mozan's unmarked SUV at 8th Avenue and Oak Street. He's showing me how EPD can observe activity from two of the cameras located downtown.

Accessing the camera near Kesey Square, he tries to zoom in on a group of people next to Sizzle Pie. Whoops, all of their backs are turned to the camera's lens.

"I guess they're starting to catch on there's a camera there," I say.

Mozan replies that's OK.

"We're not here to snoop. We're here to prevent crime," he says. "This is public space so everybody should feel secure in their public spaces, and if there's something that

causes people to make better decisions in those spaces, then we're for it."

This year saw the implementation of three mobile surveillance cameras intended to deter and capture any criminal activity. The cameras, though, aren't the only sets of eyes the Eugene Police Department has. It also has the city of Eugene's Downtown Ambassadors (dressed in blue polo shirts and khakis) and Downtown Eugene Inc.'s Downtown Guides (donning MAGA-esque red hats) to help its view of downtown. That's a view that residents have said has been getting worse, according to a recent city-sponsored survey.

However, EPD's downtown Eugene surveillance activity has the Civil Liberties Defense League (CLDC) con-

cerned for what sort of power dynamics this can result in. CLDC wants to put forth an alternative.

EPD has three mobile camera trailers, which can be powered by a few ways: a diesel-fueled power generator, an attached solar panel or by plugging in to the city's electrical grid.

The high-definition cameras have digital enhancement attributes that can make a faraway license plate be read easier. The cameras, which stand 36 feet high, also have lights and can easily record during the night. EPD says it will not use the camera trailers with facial recognition software.

The camera trailers are a part of an 18-month pilot program, which will run until April 2020. The pilot program policy says EPD will not use the trailers in a way that would invade peoples' privacy or to harass, intimidate or discriminate anyone.

The camera trailers, which cost the city slightly more than \$150,000, can be mobilized anywhere. They can support personnel in monitoring a crime scene, be an extra set of eyes in a tactical scenario or help out during well-attended events like an Oregon Ducks football game.

For now these cameras are set up downtown. As of press time, one is located at Kesey Square, another is on 8th Avenue and Olive Street and the third is in the shop for an oil change.

A camera trailer was moved to 8th Avenue and Olive Street after complaints of late night activity around the "Barmuda Triangle" area, Mozan says.

Mozan adds that the cameras aren't actively monitored by EPD. Sure, he can bring up the camera feeds from a laptop in a remote location — whether it's in his office or his SUV — but EPD doesn't have the labor to always watch the feed all the time.

The police could if necessary, though.

"If it needs to be active, we can certainly — we're nimble enough — to switch gears and do that," Mozan says.

The cameras are used passively. Video footage can be used for reference when a crime occurs. And that's what EPD Chief Chris Skinner said his intentions were in downtown Eugene at a City Council work session meeting on May 14.

During the work session, Skinner said communities across the country have deterred criminal behavior by erecting mobile surveillance cameras based on analytics and residents' complaints to the police.

Downtown isn't the only area that could benefit from them, he added.

Mozan says cameras on the trailers are so good that crimes don't have to happen right next to the cameras to be recorded. The cameras have an almost-CSI ability to zoom in while maintaining a clear quality.

Footage from the trailers has been useful for police cases already. He showed me an instance where someone

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