



City of Somerville, Massachusetts

Legislation Text

File #: 24-0545, Version: 1

Agenda Summary

In Support of Surveillance Procurement Transparency.

Official Text

A Resolution in Support of Surveillance Procurement Transparency

WHEREAS: The City of Somerville is the recipient of federal funds through the Urban Area Security Initiative (UASI) Grant Program provided by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) in order to enhance preparedness to prevent, protect against, respond to, and recover from terrorist attacks; and

WHEREAS: The Metro Boston Homeland Security Region (MBHSR) has been established as the local governance structure through which UASI grants are requested, received, and through which funding flows to municipalities; and

WHEREAS: The City of Somerville is a participant in the MBHSR, represented by a Jurisdictional Point of Contact (JPOC) appointed by the mayor, alongside our neighboring municipalities of Boston, Brookline, Cambridge, Chelsea, Everett, Quincy, Revere, and Winthrop; and

WHEREAS: An integral component of a JPOC's role is to represent the views and position of their municipality, to communicate with their municipality's elected leadership about MBHSR activities, and to encourage the appropriate dissemination of UASI-related information within their jurisdiction; and

WHEREAS: The 2019 adoption of the Surveillance Technology Ordinance provides a role for the City Council in determining the appropriateness of surveillance technology used by the City of Somerville; and

WHEREAS: Unlike the municipalities of Quincy and Winthrop who refused numerous times to procure ShotSpotter, the City of Somerville opted to procure ShotSpotter in 2014 through MBHSR UASI funds in order to detect gunshots and enhance police response times to violent situations; and

WHEREAS: Data increasingly shows that ShotSpotter is unreliable and ineffective, including an analysis this week from the ACLU of Massachusetts that showed that nearly 70 percent of ShotSpotter alerts in Boston led to no evidence of gunshots; and

WHEREAS: False alerts of gunshots that trigger police response can create dangerous interactions between the police and members of the community; and

WHEREAS: ACLU analysis noted a significant amount of ShotSpotter alerts in Boston were caused by noises

common in urban environments, including fireworks, backfiring vehicles, garbage trucks, and in one case a pinata being struck at a birthday party; and

WHEREAS: This Council's Legislative Matters committee received a written statement from an SPD officer on January 17th, 2023, reporting that SPD had contacted ShotSpotter at least 10 times between 2022 and 2023 because either ShotSpotter had failed to alert SPD of gunshots that were reported via 911 calls, ShotSpotter had sent alerts that could not be verified by SPD as gunshots, or because ShotSpotter alerted SPD to confirmed gunshots but had done so seemingly in the wrong location, thus likely slowing down police response time; and

WHEREAS: UASI funds can be used for a wide variety of projects, including enhancing 911 capabilities, which could be very useful if the City planned to divert 911 calls related to crises of mental health crises and substance use disorder to an unarmed civilian response team; and

WHEREAS: This City Council seeks to enhance coordination with our JPOC in order to ensure that requests made on behalf of the City align with our goals and values; **NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT**

RESOLVED: That Somerville's Jurisdictional Point of Contact discuss with the Legislative Matters Committee the process by which funding requests pertaining to surveillance technology are made, the history of Somerville requests that were withdrawn or not approved, plans regarding the future use of ShotSpotter within Somerville, and how this Council can have better communication with the JPOC prior to funding requests.