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Wanted: convention surveillance

The ACLU fears the plan for 20 video "eyes" is an invasion of privacy. The images would be purged after 30 days.

By Jeremy P. Meyer
The Denver Post

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Denver police want more eyes in the sky to watch activities on the

streets near the Pepsi Center and along the 16th Street Mall in preparation for August's Democratic National Convention.

The police hope to install at least 20 high-tech video cameras in the downtown core area that will be able to capture images as detailed as faces and license plates, said Sgt. Ernie Martinez of the Police Department.

Officials are searching for funds to install the cameras by spring, Martinez said.

"All officers have radios, but we want to put eyes to those ears," Martinez said. "It puts a cop on every corner for the protection of the citizens in the area."

That has some civil liberties advocates worried about intrusions on privacy.

"Cameras do not prevent crime," said Cathryn Hazouri, executive director of the American Civil Liberties Union of Colorado.

Cameras could prevent people from holding lawful protests that are a part of the political process, especially during the convention, she said.

"There is no need to spy. This is spying," Hazouri said. "You could be chilling the free expression of political dissent. People may be less likely to express themselves because of the fear of being on tape by the police."

The video will be watched in a yet-to-be constructed video monitoring center in the downtown police headquarters and the digital video will be stored for 30 days before it will be purged, Martinez said.

The cameras will remain in place after the convention as part of the department's High Activity Location Observation program, which has installed cameras at high-crime areas throughout the city, Martinez said.

Last week, the U.S. Justice Department and Target Corp. provided \$400,000 in grants for 21 police surveillance cameras outside four Denver high schools.

The new wireless technology will allow police to access the images from computers anywhere, including their squad cars and possibly

handheld devices, police say.

"It is designed to stop criminal activity or behavior," said Ed Ray, Denver Public Schools security chief.

Surveillance cameras have been a growing part of the urban landscape throughout the country and the world.

The British government has spent about \$1 billion since the 1990s to install an estimated 4.2 million closed-circuit cameras, or one camera for every 14 persons, according to a 2006 report by the Surveillance Studies Network, a panel of United Kingdom academics.

In the United States, cities including Baltimore, Minneapolis and Chicago have been increasing their video surveillance.

In Boston before the 2004 Democratic National Convention, police installed 30 cameras around the Fleet Center.

In 2001, face-recognition software was used for the first time at the Super Bowl to scan people entering the turnstiles to catch known criminals among the fans.

In Denver, police officials say no such software will be used.

The cameras can cost \$20,000 for a hard-wired video unit permanently installed or \$10,000 to \$12,000 for a network of three or four wireless cameras that can be moved to other locations.

A number of surveillance cameras are already in place, including on Colfax Avenue.

Private-property owners have been using cameras for years. The Denver Pavilions, for example, has its own video- security system, according to Sarah McClean, spokeswoman for the Downtown Denver Partnership.

Denver Public Schools has 1,400 surveillance cameras in its 150 schools that feed into a central video system.

The Regional Transportation District has 475 cameras on its properties, buses and light rail.

Denver police officials say they are developing policies and standards

for video surveillance and have rules already in place — such as prohibitions on using the cameras for voyeurism.

"We are going to respect the privacy rights of individuals; that's through training, supervision, policies and procedures," said Martinez, who added that the city is working with the ACLU on a draft policy.

"The ACLU has been meeting with city officials," said Hazouri of the ACLU. "But we haven't gotten anything from them to work with. You have to have procedures that don't impinge or chill free expression of ideas, whether you agree with them or not. I don't think video surveillance accomplishes anything."

Staff writer Chuck Plunkett contributed to this report. Jeremy P. Meyer: 303-954-1367 or jpmeyer@denverpost.com <<mailto:jpmeyer@denverpost.com>>

Learning from Escuela

The Denver Post

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Maybe it's the coming holidays that have softened our sometimes hard hearts, but it was pleasing, almost comforting, to watch financially strapped parents and community members coming together to save Escuela de Guadalupe.

The successful north Denver Catholic school, which educates mostly low-income Latino children and sends them on to high-achieving Denver high schools, needed more than \$200,000 in new funding or it faced closure. In just eight weeks, the school raised \$320,000. Its board recently voted to remain open and press on.

"We simply concluded that the school is working, it fulfills a need that must be met, and that we believe we have identified the right strategies to provide for it financially," said Christine Marquez, chair of Escuela's board.

The financially troubled school had one other option: seek charter school status from Denver Public Schools. But the DPS board turned it down.

Escuela, most likely, will be more successful with its own formula. But we imagine there's a lot DPS could have learned from a school that targets what most educators consider a hard-to-serve population yet produces tremendous results.

Denver Daily News

Monday, December 10, 2007

Cops want to add cameras before DNC

By ASSOCIATED PRESS - December 9, 2007

Police are looking for funding to install surveillance cameras in downtown spots before the Democratic National Convention in August.

Police hope to install at least 20 high-tech video cameras by spring that can capture images as detailed as faces and license plates, said police Sgt. Ernie Martinez.

"All officers have radios, but we want to put eyes to those ears," Martinez said. "It puts a cop on every corner for the protection of the citizens in the area."

The plan has upset some civil liberties advocates, who say the cameras could discourage people from holding lawful protests, especially during the convention.

"There is no need to spy. This is spying," said Cathryn Hazouri, executive director of the American Civil Liberties Union of Colorado. "You could be chilling the free expression of political dissent. People may be less likely to express themselves because of the fear of being on tape by the police."

Police said the city was working with the ACLU on a draft policy to respect privacy rights.

Martinez said digital video from the cameras would be stored for 30 days before being purged.

Police will keep using the cameras after the convention as part of a program in which cameras have been installed at high-crime areas throughout the city, Martinez said.

The use of surveillance cameras has been growing. Police in Boston installed 30 cameras around the Fleet Center before the 2004 Democratic National Convention.

In 2001, face-recognition software was used for the first time at the Super Bowl to scan people entering the turnstiles to catch known criminals. Denver police had no plans to use such software. The cameras can cost \$20,000 for a permanent hard-wired video unit or \$10,000 to \$12,000 for a network of three or four wireless cameras that can be moved.

Some are already in place, including on Colfax Avenue.

In Denver, private property owners have used surveillance cameras for years. Denver Public Schools has 1,400 cameras in its 150 schools that feed into a central video system.

The Regional Transportation District has 475 cameras on its properties and vehicles.