September 12, 2024
Sent Via Email

City Council President Sara Nelson, At-Large
Councilmember Tanya Woo, At-Large
Councilmember Rob Saka, District 1
Councilmember Tammy Morales, District 2
Councilmember Joy Hollingsworth, District 3
Councilmember Maritza Rivera, District 4
Councilmember Cathy Moore, District 5
Councilmember Dan Strauss, District 6
Councilmember Bob Kettle, District 7

Re: Technology Assisted Crime Prevention Pilot Project

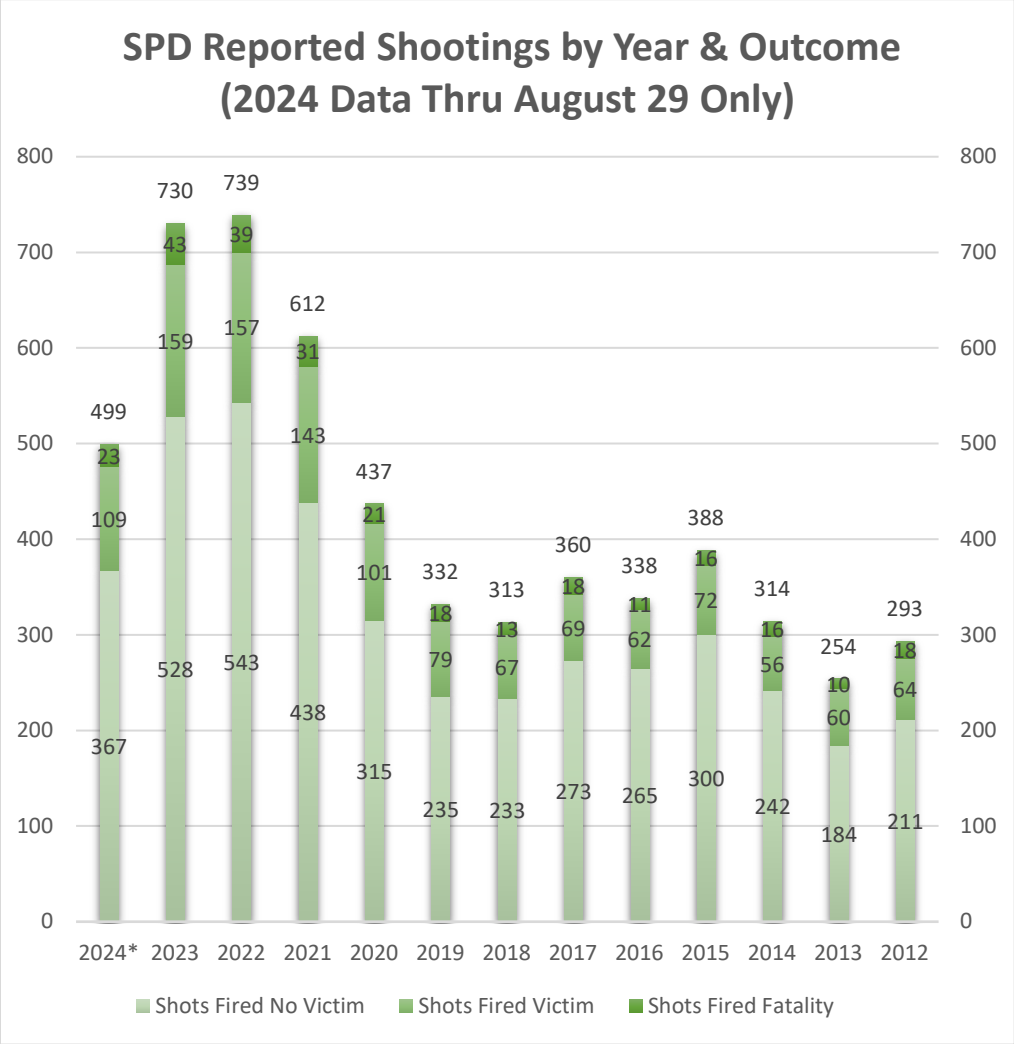
Dear Councilmembers,

I have transmitted legislation that authorizes the purchase and installation of CCTV cameras and the Police Department's Real Time Crime Center software at specific city locations to help detect, deter, and prevent gun violence, human trafficking, and persistent felony crime.

I want to share a few observations about the pilot project and comment on some of the reactions we have received during our neighborhood public outreach listening sessions.

First, gun violence, human trafficking, and persistent felony crimes are concentrated at specific geographic locations in the city. This is known as the "law of crime concentration," a well-documented reality in Seattle and cities nationwide. Based on the police department's analysis of concentrated violent crime, we have chosen three locations for the pilot project: (1) Aurora Avenue North in North Seattle, (2) the Chinatown-International District, including Little Saigon, and (3) the Third Avenue corridor downtown.

Gun violence has soared in recent years in Seattle, as documented in the chart below. Through August 29 this year, reports of gun violence have increased 2.5% over the same period last year. If this year's trend continues, we may set a record high for the number of annual gun violence events. Many of these shootings involve the firing of dozens of bullets due to the availability of large-capacity magazines and "switch" devices that can convert a pistol into a machine gun. This gun violence against the people of Seattle compels us to act and use every option we can to stop it.



Second, these violent crimes disproportionately impact people of color. Of the fatal and non-fatal shooting events this year through August 29, 120 of 206 victims were people of color (58.3%).[1] These victims, their families and friends, and the people living and working in the neighborhoods where these crimes occurred deserve extra measures of help from the city government to prevent a continuation of these crimes and to hold those responsible accountable.

Third, when used wisely, these technologies can reduce crime, improve evidence collection, strengthen cases for prosecution, and lead to safer neighborhoods. The academic research on these technologies shows that careful implementation can be effective. Our pilot project is designed to (1) address specific crimes in (2) specific places as part of a (3) broader approach that includes community-based interventions and other prevention efforts, all factors the research shows improve effectiveness.

[1] Of the 206 identified gun violence victims, 111 were Black or African American, 50 were White, eight were Asian, and one was Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander. The victim's race was unknown in 36 cases. Shootings without a victim are confirmed when police officers recover evidence at the scene, such as bullet casings or fragments, or have identified eyewitnesses.

In cooperation with the Office of the Inspector General for Public Safety and SPD's Performance Analytics and Research Unit, has retained academic subject matter experts on these technologies to craft and manage an implementation and outcome evaluation of the pilot project.[2]

Fourth, as part of our public outreach, we found widespread support for the project in the pilot neighborhoods, which led the Community Police Commission not to oppose implementing the technologies. More than 1,000 comments for and against the technologies were recorded. (Appendix A includes a summary of our outreach efforts.)

Fifth, there is opposition to the pilot project, primarily from organizations and individuals concerned about government surveillance who do not believe these technologies will effectively address crime. This opposition frequently raises legitimate concerns about privacy, the criminal legal system, disproportionate enforcement efforts, and their belief that the government doesn't do enough to address the underlying causes of crime. The opponents would rather see deeper investments in community-based prevention efforts.

It's important to note that the City spends more than $100 million each year on non-police crime prevention and reduction efforts, including early-in-life interventions designed to give children the strong start they deserve, community-based peer-led violence interruption and reduction efforts, crime victim supports, retaliation reduction efforts, diversion from the criminal legal system, and re-entry programs designed to reduce recidivism. These investments recognize that police-only actions, as necessary and valuable as they may be, are insufficient to address crime adequately. Our approach to safety is holistic, acknowledging that no single effort can prevent or reduce criminal behavior.

The pilot project will be implemented with several protections against privacy violations or unintended consequences, such as limiting surveillance to public places in specific geographic areas where the identified crimes are concentrated, prohibiting the use of face recognition software, adopting limited data retention periods, broad neighborhood outreach before and during the pilot project, a rigorous and independent implementation and outcome evaluation by outside academic experts, and periodic reporting to the public on the project's performance and outcomes.

Sixth, the pilot project provides additional tools to prevent crime and hold offenders accountable at a time when police staffing levels are at historic lows. More than 700 officers have left our police service since 2019. As of July 2024, only 930 police officers were available for deployment in the city, one of the lowest numbers of in-service officers since 1991, when this statistic was first recorded, while the city's population has increased more than 45% since then. Low staffing levels limit the effectiveness of

[2] A study evaluating Chicago police real-time crime centers, with their integrated technologies, such as CCTV and ALPR, showed a 5% increase in crime clearance rates for violent crime, a 12% increase for property crimes, and an 11% increase in overall crime clearance rates. Another study (Guerette and Przeszlowski, 2023) reviewed 648 violent crime cases in Miami that received RTCC support compared to cases that did not receive RTCC support. They found that the RTCC-assisted cases had 66% greater odds of being cleared than the control cases. A randomized control trial in New Jersey found CCTV linked with directed police patrols "generates a crime control benefit greater than what research suggests is achievable via 'stand-alone' CCTV deployment, particularly in the case of street-level crime" and that the trial "was associated with significant reductions of violent crime and social disorder in the treatment areas relative to the control areas." (Piza and Caplan, 2015)

policing efforts, hinder response times to emergencies, negatively affect investigations, harm case clearance capabilities, and restrict efforts to hold offenders accountable.

Finally, I want to highlight the guiding principles that will be followed when implementing these technologies.

1. The technologies will only be implemented following City Council approval.

2. City-deployed CCTV technology will only monitor public places like sidewalks, streets, and parks.

3. CCTV will be deployed in places where community outreach has been conducted, an outreach process that will continue through the project's implementation phase.

4. CCTV video recordings will be erased after 30 days unless transferred to SPD's digital evidence management system because they contain evidence of criminal behavior. Video moved to SPD's evidence management system will be maintained as long as needed for investigations or prosecutions and to comply with the state's records retention law.

5. Face-recognition technologies will not be used.

6. As mandated by City or state laws, the Seattle Police Department will not cooperate in criminal or civil enforcement of laws related to immigration or reproductive and/or gender-affirming health care services.

7. At the end of the pilot project, a decision will be made about whether to continue the project, change the project design, or move the technology to another location where gun violence, human trafficking, or persistent felony crime is concentrated.

8. The Office of the Inspector General for Public Safety and SPD's Performance Analytics and Research Unit have retained academic subject matter experts to develop and manage an implementation and outcome evaluation of the pilot project. The evaluation results will be reported at the end of the first year, and a final report will be published at the end of the second year.

9. The Police Department will create a public-facing dashboard that will update frequently and report on the uses of the technologies, including descriptions of what is being recorded and the number of police actions, such as arrests, Terry stops, and vehicles recovered. The evaluation reports will also be published on this dashboard.

If you have questions about this project, please contact Deputy Mayor Tim Burgess at tim.burgess@seattle.gov or 206-798-5007 or Strategic Advisor Sarah Smith at sarah.smith@seattle.gov.

Sincerely,

Mayor Bruce A. Harrell

Appendix A Public Engagement

The City's public engagement and input process included two citywide public meetings, 15 neighborhood meetings, and feedback from organizations such as the NAACP, ACLU, and SPD advisory groups from the pilot areas. More than 1,000 public comments were received for and against the pilot project.

In addition, the six Community Safety Forums held across the city in the spring also included opportunities for public comment on the technologies.

Here is the list of the organizations engaged during the outreach process.

- SPD's North, South, East, and West Precinct Advisory Councils
- NAACP
- Seattle Chamber of Commerce
- Greater Seattle Business Association (GSBA)
- Community Police Commission (CPC)
- African American Community Advisory Council
- East African Advisory Council
- Filipino Community of Seattle
- Emerald City Bible Fellowship Church
- CID Community Safety Council (Including Friends of Little Saigon, CIDBIA, Seniors in Action etc.)
- For North Seattle, a business advocacy group
- ACLU
- Businesses along Aurora Ave North
- Downtown Seattle Association