

York City residents split on ShotSpotter

The York Dispatch

By Daina Klimanis

12/14/2007 10:47:52 AM EST

Henry Schalle has seen 17 years' worth of customers come through York City's Central Market, where he has been selling eyeglasses as Wandering Eyes Optical. But he knows others stay away because they are worried about crime.

So when he heard about Mayor John Brenner's proposal to put gunshot-detection technology and cameras into city neighborhoods, Schalle decided the system was worth trying out.

"I think anything that's positive will help bring people back downtown," Schalle said.

But support for the system among those who live and work in the city is split. Resident Mordecai Coleman said he doubts a few cameras will stop the "loose cannons" that are firing shots in the city.

"They could put all that money in the police department," Coleman said. "They could put all that money in the schools."

How it works: The ShotSpotter system, which would cover about a third of the city, notifies authorities as soon as a shot is fired, provides a specific location and turns cameras toward the sound.

Though Brenner has spent years looking for grants to pay for the system, he said he is tired of waiting and wants to install the system early 2008.

"My hope is that it will prevent a number of the shots that are fired in the city," Brenner said.

He hasn't given up on finding state help or other funds to cut the city's bill. Nevertheless, Brenner said the system is worth it even if the city has to pay the entire \$500,000 price tag itself.

The ShotSpotter is one of the big-ticket items in Brenner's proposed 2008 budget, which includes the first payment of about \$60,000 toward the system. Costs would rise to \$120,000 for each year after that until the system is paid off, city business administrator Michael O'Rourke has said.

Though the payment makes up only a tiny fraction of the proposed \$86 million city budget, it is one of a number of new expenditures that are contributing to a proposed 7.3 percent increase in property taxes.

Vote likely: The ShotSpotter proposal has the support of the city council; four of five members said they want to keep the system in the budget, which comes up for a council vote on Tuesday.

Not everyone wants to spend the money. City resident Anthony Greer said he does not want his taxes to rise to pay for the system, which he said would be more appropriate for major cities with bigger crime problems.

"Why should I have to spend my money on something if we don't need it?" Greer said.

But Frank McKee, who works in the city, said gunshot detection could be valuable as long as it's part of a broader strategy for fighting crime in town.

"Especially with the proliferation of guns in the community, I'm all for it," McKee said.

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