

High-tech system may help police

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Mayor-President Kip Holden wants to provide local law enforcement agencies with high-tech eyes and ears in the sky to help monitor areas associated with criminal activity.

Holden is pushing a \$3.5 million budget supplement to install James Bond-type cameras equipped with shot spotter technology that will immediately report gunshots to police.

City-parish Information Services Director Don Evans, who is coordinating the technical side of the project, said the shot spotters can pinpoint within five feet of where a gun was fired.

“They will automatically alert police that a gunshot was fired, and can even determine the caliber of the gun,” Evans said.

The FBI used similar technology to track the freeway sniper in Virginia a few years ago, he said.

Evans said the program calls for the purchase and installation of some 80 high-tech cameras at strategic locations across East Baton Rouge Parish.

Evans said the cameras will be equipped with antennae that will enable police officers to move the cameras, and review stored video when necessary.

Police will be able to access the cameras with laptop computers from their cars, or from desktop computers located at police headquarters and other office buildings.

Evans said the video from the surveillance cameras won't be available to the public under normal circumstances.

At least one council member said he has mixed feelings about the project.

“If this is something that will help police fight crime, then I'm

all for it. But I would rather see us using the \$4 million to put more police officers on the street,” Councilman Ulysses “Bones” Addison said.

He noted that the mere presence of extra police on the street would help curtail crime. The cameras, by contrast, may just steer criminal activity to other areas.

On the other hand, Addison said, he thinks most local residents who live in high-crime areas will welcome the cameras.

“We’re not talking about putting these cameras in the Country Club of Louisiana,” Addison said.

He also warned that there could be constitutional issues about using the video cameras and shot spotters as evidence.

Evans pointed out that some of the surveillance cameras are intentionally made not to look like cameras so criminals won’t recognize them.

Evans also said several other American cities, including Baltimore, Oakland and Washington, D.C., are using the high-tech surveillance cameras.

Mayor pushes for cameras

Walter Monsour, the mayor’s chief administrative officer, declined comment on the specifics of the proposal, which is slated Wednesday to go before the Council’s Finance and Executive Committee as part of a \$20 million budget supplement.

Monsour said he’s in the process of briefing council members on the budget supplement items, and doesn’t want them to think he released the information to the press before giving it to the council.

“But I will say that one of the things that I wanted to do when I got here was to bring cutting-edge technology to our first responders,” he said.

Monsour noted that similar technology is also in use by the U.S. military in Iraq.

Police Chief Jeff LeDuff also declined comment.

Even though the Metro Council hasn’t yet approved funding for the new surveillance camera network, at least one other agency has made a commitment to join the high-tech system.

The East Baton Rouge Recreation and Park Commission last month agreed to spend \$150,000 to buy and install 11 to 12 surveillance cameras for use in local parks that have a history of trouble.

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