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## Project Green Light faces scrutiny as Detroit eyes mandate for thousands of businesses

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Violet Ikonomova

Project Green Light camera at a McDonald's on Eight Mile in Detroit. More than 230 businesses have invested thousands of dollars in the real-time surveillance program by Detroit police.

Business owners and civil liberties activists are questioning the efficacy and constitutionality of Detroit's costly real-time surveillance camera program, Project Green Light, following word that city officials intend to press forward with a plan that would force thousands of businesses to buy into the program.

Detroit Mayor Mike Duggan last week told ***Crain's Detroit Business*** he thinks "the votes in council are there" to approve a mandate that would require all retail businesses open between the hours of 10 p.m. and 4 a.m. to buy the camera equipment and technology that pipes the footage into Detroit Police Department headquarters. Currently, there are 231 businesses enrolled in Project Green Light, which launched in 2016. Participating businesses pay \$4,000-\$6000 for the cameras, signage, and lighting, plus an additional \$90-\$150 a month for internet from Comcast or Dan Gilbert's Rocket Fiber.

The plan to eventually make late-night businesses join Project Green Light is built on the notion that the crime reductions seen at some participating locations can be replicated as additional businesses sign on. But as the program has expanded, the crime reductions it's yielded have grown more modest. While the first eight businesses to sign up for the program have seen incidents of violent crime drop by 50 percent, the more than 150 businesses that came online last year have seen only an 11 percent reduction in violent

crime, according to the DPD's latest crime statistics.

"At the beginning it was perfect," says a gas station operator at Seven Mile and Evergreen who asked that we not use his name. "We were one of the people who first put that green light, but now we're at square one, to be honest with you.

"Everybody has it and when you call the police they are overwhelmed and they don't respond."

Those possibly waning benefits may have something to do with the way the program is set up. While the surveillance camera may be the most identifiable — and costly — feature of Project Green Light, the program actually employs a multi-pronged approach to thwarting crime, with weekly police visits and faster emergency response times included among the benefits of participation. According to the Green Light website, any emergency that occurs at a partnering location is automatically deemed a "**priority 1**" and, as a result, the city says that Green Light businesses have seen their calls answered in an average of 14 minutes. What the program **does not guarantee**, however, is that anyone will actually be monitoring the surveillance video stream, as stated in the Memorandum of Understanding between Green Light partners and the city.

Billy Jawad paid \$7,000 to get Green Light equipment installed at the gas station he operates on 7 Mile and Meyers following a **robbery-turned-deadly shooting** a couple of years ago. But he says the investment has little to do with the real-time crime monitoring; he views it mostly as a fee for better policing in a crime-ridden city with a depleted tax base.

"It's more of a 'pay and we'll come or don't pay and we're not coming,'" says Jawad, who says he still has to phone each incident into 9-1-1. "We used to call Detroit police and sometimes they wouldn't come til the next day. The longest they take now is 10 to 15 minutes."

But while Jawad says he sees officers from his neighborhood precinct at least once a week, the gas station operator we spoke with four miles to his east says he can't remember the last time the police stopped by.

"The police used to come every day to check in twice to sign the log," says the man who asked to remain anonymous, referring to a check-in sheet Green Light partners receive. "We wasted money for nothing."

City officials maintain that the surveillance piece of the program has proven effective in deterring crime, particularly robberies and carjackings. Carjackings have seen a 40 percent reduction since the year Project Green Light rolled out, according to the DPD's latest data.

But if the cameras are sending would-be car thieves in the opposite direction, they're failing to stop others from perpetrating crimes in open view.

Last month WDIV aired surveillance video of two men rushing through a convenience store that was a Green Light partner, stuffing empty bags with dry goods and frozen foods before walking out. The TV station has run several reports that cast doubt on the program's benefits, including "**Thieves break into cellphone store despite Detroit's Project Green Light**" and "**Thieves target Detroit gas station, despite police surveillance.**"

Violent crimes including **shootings** and **armed robberies** have also been

caught on the real-time video streams. While the high-definition video footage is often used by police after the fact in an effort to identify and **catch suspects**, there has yet to be one publicly reported incident in which officers were dispatched by those monitoring the surveillance feeds to stop a crime in progress. A spokeswoman for the Detroit Police Department was unable to provide an example in which a crime in progress was stopped with help from Green Light surveillance. She did provide an anecdote in which two suspects were caught within days of allegedly shooting a transgender woman in November.



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Project Green Light signage at a McDonald's on Eight Mile in Detroit. More than 230 businesses have invested thousands of dollars in the real-time surveillance program by Detroit police.

The spokeswoman also couldn't say how many people monitor the more than 200 video feeds streaming into the department's Real Time Crime Center at any given time.

A lack of guaranteed real-time monitoring is the reason that Kasey Bazzi, owner of Kasey's Beer and Wine on Joy Road near Greenfield, opted not to become a Green Light partner. Instead, he spent less to pursue his own crime-fighting solution.

"I have an actual person monitoring my business [between midnight and 8 a.m.] and then speakers around my building where the person will jump on the microphone [if they see something]," he says. "I've stopped several break-ins like this — I used to get break-ins every other month."

Now, with a possible mandate looming, he wonders whether the city will reimburse him for the several thousand dollars he spent on his system. And, of course, there's the more obvious question of, "Why don't they pay for the [new] cameras?"

If the mandate comes to fruition, such questions could eventually be raised by lawyers. In a ***Detroit News*** article published when the plan was first floated by Councilmember Andre Spivey and the Duggan administration last summer, University of Detroit-Mercy law professor Larry Dubin said the ordinance could face a court challenge over whether it's a "proper exercise of power."

“The validity of the proper use of power exercised by the city in passing an ordinance is whether it serves the health, safety, and welfare interests of the community,” Dubin told the *News*. “Are there alternative ways to accomplish its goals? Do other cities have this type of ordinance, and if so, (what are) their results? What are the unintended consequences of having this law?”

In addition to costs incurred by businesses, privacy issues are a major concern for some Detroit residents and civil rights activists.

“We don’t know at this point how long a video tape is going to be retained, who even has authority to view it,” says Detroit-based attorney Eric Williams, who says he is looking into the Green Light program for the American Civil Liberties Union of Michigan. “We don’t know the extent to which it can be shared with [Immigration and Customs Enforcement], Homeland Security, the FBI.”

A Detroit police spokeswoman did not immediately respond to an inquiry for that information.

Williams says that without evidence that the real-time surveillance technology is used to stop crimes in progress, the video monitoring portion of Project Green Light seems to provide few benefits beyond the standard, recorded surveillance video systems that Detroit gas stations are **already required to possess** under a separate mandate. That video footage remains in a business owner’s possession and is provided to police upon request.

Williams says there’s an added level of civil rights infringement with real-time monitoring.

“Certain communities could find themselves under additional scrutiny,” he says, noting the vulnerable immigrant populations in Southwest. Detroit officials last year declined to designate Detroit a **"sanctuary city,"** a distinction that indicates police officials would refuse to cooperate with federal customs and immigration officials.

The ACLU of Michigan has also expressed concern over the possibility that DPD will add facial recognition technology to the Green Light program. In a statement to WDIV in October, the group said if inaccurate, the technology could **falsely identify** people as being criminals.

Councilmember Andre Spivey said in an interview Wednesday that the proposed mandate is in its preliminary stages and won’t be introduced until DPD is able to clear a backlog of businesses waiting to enroll in the program. He said, down the line, efforts would be made to make the measure as palatable as possible for residents and business owners.

But while Spivey said he appreciated concerns over the cost of the program and which agencies might have access to the video footage, he seemed to brush aside the grievances voiced by privacy advocates.

“I understand that’s a concern, but most folks are riding around every day not knowing where cameras are,” Spivey said. “If you go downtown or to Midtown, we’re always on camera ... but where it will be used, whose hands it can wind up in, all of those are concerns of mine.”

The backlog of businesses waiting to join Green Light is reportedly **six**

**months long.** A spokesman for Duggan says he does not expect the issue to move forward this year.

Tags: Detroit, Project Green Light, ACLU, civil rights, privacy rights, late-night businesses, gas stations, Mayor Duggan, Councilmember Andre Spivey, Image

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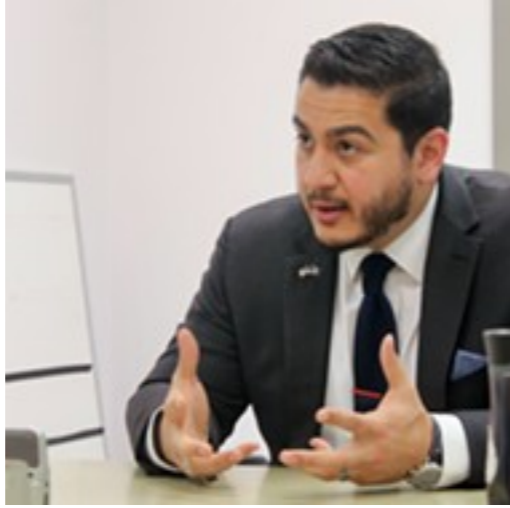
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