

VPSN: Olympic CCTV Deputation - 090326

The following was presented to the City of Vancouver's Budget and Finance Committee (a Committee of Council) at their March 26, 2009 meeting.

My name is Andrew Pask, and I'm here today on behalf of the Vancouver Public Space Network.

The VPSN has been following the debate around CCTV in Vancouver for a number of years now. As part of our work we have reviewed studies on the efficacy of surveillance technology, its economic and social impacts, and the broader privacy issues that are associated with this technology.

We support the Privacy Commissioners notion that CCTV is "a tool of last resort" and further, that the justification for its deployment needs to be supported by sound empirical research. We note that, to the best of our knowledge, this has not yet been undertaken as part of the proposed project.

The report in question deals ostensibly with the specific issue of CCTV deployment during the Olympics, so my comments, at present, won't get into any of the broader arguments for or against the use of surveillance technology. We do, however, feel that there needs to be space for these discussions. In this regard, we are concerned that the lure of free provincial money has in essence curtailed any reasonable discussion around the issue and framed the deployment is a done deal.

We understand from the report that is being presented today that there will be some stakeholder consultations undertaken with this proposal. We would have hoped that the consultation would take place prior to this report, not after we, as a city, have signed on the dotted line.

That being said, we welcome the opportunity to participate in the stakeholder discussions that are mentioned in the report. In advance of this, we want to take this opportunity to raise a few points of concern so that they can be on the table now.

The first is that previous councils have suggested that there would appropriate public consultation around the deployment of CCTV in the city.

Given that even known stakeholders weren't provided much in the way of notice, and given that there seems to be a "rush" to undertake this project now, we are concerned that there will be little opportunity for the public to be informed of this, or to have an opportunity to voice their concerns.

The second point rests on a key descriptor that is used in the report in a number of cases: temporary.

The report suggests that the funds that will be accessed - some \$2 million dollars - will be used for a temporary CCTV initiative that will be tested at the Festival of Lights, and rolled out during the Olympics.

I have to say, given the track record that's been seen in the previous two Olympics, this term causes us a fair bit of concern. In these cases, the "temporary" CCTV apparatus was gifted to the respective municipalities - and thus made a permanent fixture in these cities. We find the prospect of similar happening in Vancouver to be unacceptable.

As a result, we would like some clarification as to what, exactly, is meant by "temporary." More specifically, we are hopeful that the City will move to present a hard date when any CCTV technology that is introduced as part of this Olympic initiative is removed.

There is too much opportunity for ambiguity around the idea of temporary CCTV when the system that is being contemplated is mobile. We don't want a permanent system of temporary CCTV locations. Again, a hard date for the removal of this technology is, we feel, the way to go.

Thank you.