

MAYOR'S MESSAGE

Craig A. Stough 2/26/2020

"Sylvania Police Division Cameras"

We are all familiar with seeing police videos on the evening news and on television shows featuring police videos. I remember seeing one on television more than ten years ago taken by the Ottawa Hills Police of a high speed chase scene through their village. The City of Sylvania Police Division also has had police video recordings for more than 10 years utilizing patrol car dash mounted cameras.

The Sylvania Police Division current dash mounted camera system is L3 Mobile Vision, and utilizes technology and equipment now considered obsolete. The 2020 Sylvania City Budget includes \$100,000 of capital improvement funds for updated cameras. The City is also currently under consideration for a U.S. Office of Criminal Justice Services grant that will help defray some of the cost.

The Police Division is researching two of the leading police video companies who can supply the new cameras and video data storage – Getac and Watchguard. The newer cameras are digital with high resolution that can capture different perspectives from the patrol car including wide angle, back seat, audio from inside the car, and also sync with police officer body worn cameras.

Although some area police departments have begun using body cameras, the City of Sylvania has held back waiting for the digital technology, the data storage options and the laws concerning body camera video usage to be developed and tested. With the need to replace our dash cameras, however, the City of Sylvania is now considering body worn cameras.

As of the end of 2018, more than 10,500, or almost 60% of America's 18,000 police agencies utilized body worn cameras. Each agency must decide what is workable and right for their own community. We have been concerned not just about the cost, but also the legal issues of who has access to the videos, the proper use of body worn camera videos in legal proceedings, and protecting the privacy of our residents in their own homes.

By some opinion polls, 89% of Americans have come to expect body camera footage from police incidents. The City of Sylvania Police Division has had no such incidents, but those same polls indicate many Americans have a sense the police are hiding something if there is no video footage or if the camera wasn't turned on.

The positives of body worn cameras: Police accountability and transparency, evidentiary benefits for the prosecution of offenders, an excellent learning tool for other officers reviewing the recordings, the use of force incidents typically decline and citizen complaints are usually fewer due to the camera being on. The negatives of body worn cameras: Legal questions about citizen privacy in non-public areas, and the cameras are expensive to purchase and to store the data.

The City of Sylvania Police Division will be finalizing their camera replacement request, including body worn cameras, in the next few months, along with cost and grant data, for submittal to the City administration, and then for consideration by the Safety Committee of Sylvania City Council.



Getac Body Camera



Watchguard Body Camera