

Salisbury adopts Flock cameras amid privacy, surveillance concerns

By Josh Davis

Salisbury recently joined a growing number of Maryland communities using Flock Safety cameras and license plate readers, calling them a “force multiplier” for police, meaning more work can be done with fewer officers.

However, watchdog groups have expressed concerns about the use of mass surveillance technology that critics say is ripe for abuse, from improper data collection to potential misuse by federal immigration enforcement.

Salisbury Mayor Randy Taylor described the system — which includes 40 cameras and license plate readers in high-crime areas — as “a revolutionary way of doing policing,” adding that it will deter crime and improve the ability to catch suspects after the fact. The City Council unanimously approved a nearly \$400,000 contract with Flock in December.

The system features fixed automatic license plate readers (ALPR), static video cameras, and portable units that provide real-time data to law enforcement, said Capt. Ryan Koerner of the Salisbury Police Department. He called the upgrade a “critical public-safety technology enhancement” that will boost situational awareness and investigative outcomes.

Taylor and Koerner both described the cameras as tools that amplify the impact of officers, allowing more efficient deployment of resources. Koerner said the city has addressed privacy concerns and will comply with Maryland laws, including annual audits and strict rules limiting access to law enforcement investigations only. Misuse carries harsh criminal penalties.

Concerns raised by watchdogs: Despite these assurances, watchdog groups have voiced strong concerns about mass surveillance and potential abuses, such as improper data collection and the risk of use by federal immigration enforcement.

Jay Stanley, senior policy analyst for the ACLU, called Flock cameras “a kind of mass surveillance” with chilling effects on privacy and community trust. He said the systems can track people’s movements nearly like GPS, collecting data on where and when people travel, even when they are not suspected of wrongdoing.

Stanley told The Sun “we don’t have an objection to checking for vehicles that might be stolen or otherwise wanted, but the police shouldn’t be keeping records of where everybody’s driving all the time. When the number of readers becomes sufficiently large, it starts to approach the equivalent of putting a GPS tracker in everybody’s car as the density of these readers increases.”

Critics also worry about the potential for data sharing with federal agencies like ICE, despite Flock’s stated lack of formal partnerships. Stanley said access can happen informally through employees with personal connections.