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City to extend red light camera contract

By Bryan M. Gold - Citizen Staff Writer Apr 1, 2014

The Elk Grove City Council on March 26 voted to extend a contract with the company that installed and maintained the city's red light camera system at a few intersections since 2007.

The 4-1 vote, with Council Member Steve Detrick voting no, calls for the city to continue its collaboration with Redflex Traffic Systems for three years with two one-year extension opportunities. This new contract is subject to approval by the company.

The new contract's costs have not been determined, as of press time.

When the red light cameras went online seven years ago, the city budgeted \$211,000 for the original Redflex contract.

Elk Grove's recent budget documents estimated the city would receive \$775,000 in revenue from red light violation fines for the current fiscal year that ends June 30.

"It's another Big Brother item," Detrick said before the Council's March 26 vote.

He said he's not a fan of the cameras, and he argued that the system indirectly takes away jobs from traffic officers. However, Detrick said placing traffic officers at the five intersections would not be as cost-effective as the cameras.

Council Member Pat Hume said he entered the meeting ready to cancel the contract.

"You at least got me on the fence about it," he told Police Chief Robert Lehner.

The chief's staff report and presentation cited statistics comparing the number of violations and the number of citations. He said the number of violations at the five intersections for the last few years has remained around 1,500 per month. During that same time period, the number of citations issued has remained constant at 200-300 per month.

“I think the flashing light is making a difference in people’s behavior,” the chief said.

He said the cameras for right turns will not trigger unless the motorist goes through a red light at 14 miles per hour or faster. The chief said a motorist who comes to a stop in the intersection would not be cited because they made an attempt to stop.

“All you have to do is pretend to stop and you won’t get a ticket,” Lehner said.

Resident Mike Monasky said he was cited for traveling through an intersection at five miles per hour. During Lehner’s presentation, Monasky sat behind the chief and held a sign noting he paid \$571 for that violation.

“This is bad for business,” he said, adding people won’t come to Elk Grove if they think they will be cited at certain intersections.

Monasky said safety comes from putting out pedestrian “amenities” including better signage and lighting.

Vice Mayor Jim Cooper, who initially brought up the contract earlier this year, said the officers who review the violations offer a great amount of leeway before deciding whether to issue a citation.

“It’s designed to change people’s habits,” said Cooper, who is a captain in the Sacramento County Sheriff’s Department. “Obviously, people are out there running red lights, so it’s made everybody stop and take a look.”

He added, “I’m not a big fan of red light camera enforcement, but it is a useful tool.”

The contract amendment includes the installation of one red light camera system at what city staff termed a “mutually agreeable location” in Elk Grove.

The amendment would also eliminate the cameras at the left turn approaches at Bruceville Road and Laguna Boulevard, and Franklin and Laguna boulevards.

Lehner said before the meeting that the small number of violations and citations at these two intersections does not justify the monthly maintenance cost.

City staff said an amended fee schedule is expected to result in cost savings for the city.