

DEVELOPING

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## Not Just Cameras: Tracking System Installed in Ocean Springs

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The OS Board of Aldermen authorized a \$55,200 two-year contract with **Flock Safety**, a privately owned company specializing in advanced surveillance technology.

OCEAN SPRINGS, MS — *In less than 12 seconds* — the City of Ocean Springs approved an advanced tracking network that records your car's every move without you knowing. No discussion. No public input. Just a quiet vote, hidden in the fine print of a consent agenda, where they hoped you wouldn't notice. *And you didn't — until now.*

The camera system was first approved back in May when the Board of Aldermen authorized a \$55,200 two-year contract with **Flock Safety**, a privately owned company specializing in advanced surveillance technology.

Ocean Springs will pay an additional \$24,000 for each subsequent year the system is in place.

The agenda sheet, available to residents attending the meeting, described the deal vaguely as 'Authorize the Police Chief to execute a contract with Flock Safety for a 24-month initial term; the contract has been reviewed by the City Attorney.'

The description did not detail the system's vast capabilities, its far-reaching implications, or its cost to the taxpayer. Instead, it was presented as routine, swept into the consent agenda — a procedural mechanism that allows the Board to vote on multiple items in one swoop. This is usually reserved for day to day items like employee pay raises or resignations — not the implementation of systems that track the movements of residents.

The city installed a network of cameras that feed data to the sophisticated software on a Sunday morning in December, during a time most residents were home or at church. The public remained in the dark throughout the whole process.

### What Does the System Do?

This is not just a network of cameras to catch car thieves. It is a highly invasive surveillance system that tracks, analyzes, and records your vehicle's movements. Every car or truck passing through the cameras is scanned and logged — license plates, make, model, color, even decals or damages — creating a detailed map of where your car has been, when you were there, and how often you return. Over time, it learns



your routines and anticipates your next move by identifying recurring vehicle patterns. It knows where you work, where you shop, and where you visit.

The system, described by city officials as a tool to “solve and prevent crime,” raises a troubling question: how does a machine prevent crime? The answer, perhaps, lies in its algorithms, which identify patterns of behavior it deems suspicious. You could find yourself flagged not because you’ve done anything wrong, but because your movements match a profile the system doesn’t trust. In this world, coincidence can put you on a list. Driving the wrong route at the wrong time could make you a suspect before you even know it.

While the city retains data in 30 day intervals, the contract allows **Flock Safety** to use this data, stripped of personalization, indefinitely to train its artificial intelligence machines.

That means every errand you run, every trip you take that passes a camera is fed into a private company’s growing surveillance network. Your movements fuel its algorithms, sharpening its ability to track and predict behavior not just here, but anywhere these systems are deployed.

Your life, your habits, and your movements are now part of a system that is always watching.

### **Lawsuits Filed in Other Cities**

The surveillance technology installed in Ocean Springs is not unique. In 2023, **Flock Safety** began rolling out their advanced tracking system in municipalities throughout the country. By the latter part of 2024, lawsuits and controversies surrounding Flock emerged across the country.

In California, a class-action lawsuit claims the cameras violate the Fourth Amendment by enabling warrantless surveillance, while a federal lawsuit in Virginia describes them as tools for “warrantless tracking.”

In Rhode Island, privacy advocates argue the cameras create an unconstitutional dragnet, tracking law-abiding citizens alongside suspects.

In Texas, the Department of Public Safety issued a cease and desist order prohibiting Flock’s cameras on private property over concerns about data misuse and oversight.

Meanwhile, civil rights groups in San Francisco have criticized the system for turning public spaces into tools for mass surveillance.

A federal lawsuit in Connecticut challenges the indiscriminate tracking of all vehicles as a violation of constitutional protections. A company called Privacy Wiki has documented a growing list of similar cases nationwide.

Ocean Springs, without any public discussion or input, installed its network after many of these lawsuits were filed, knowingly inviting the same scrutiny and legal challenges other cities are now facing.

### **What Do City Officials Say?**

City officials have been mostly silent on the details of the surveillance system and the process by which it was approved.

Ravin Nettles, spokesperson for Mayor Kenny Holloway’s office, responded briefly when asked about the new system, stating, “The purpose of the cameras is for security.” Nettles confirmed that the technology was approved at the May 21st Board of Aldermen meeting and noted funding is through the police department’s general budget. When pressed for further clarification, such as the locations of the cameras, how data is stored, and who has access to it — Nettles did not respond.

Alderman-at-Large Bobby Cox, who recently announced his candidacy for mayor, offered a more candid perspective. Cox expressed concern over the scope of the system, admitting that its capabilities had not been fully understood at the time of approval.

“I think it might be something we need to go back and revisit and make sure we’re not getting involved in tracking our constituents in that way,” he said. “The only way we wanted to do it was for public safety



issues.”

Cox acknowledged the shortcomings in the process, particularly the decision to bury the contract in the consent agenda, stating, “We need to probably start looking and being a little more strict on what exactly goes through it and what gets discussed.”

He also indicated that the Board may not have been fully aware of what they were approving. “I would be surprised if Chief LeMaire knew the depth of this,” Cox added. “I think we’ll be having a discussion about this and definitely review this because this is way more in-depth than I would have ever imagined.”

The remaining six aldermen were asked for comment on why such a controversial system was approved without public input. All six declined to respond.

### **A Failure of Transparency**

The approval and installation of this surveillance system reflects a troubling disregard for transparency and accountability. Passed quietly (*and unanimously*) in less than 12 seconds and buried in a consent agenda – the contract brought one of the most invasive tracking networks into Ocean Springs without public input or debate.

*This is not just about cameras; it’s about trust.*

Ocean Springs residents deserved a voice in a decision that affects their privacy, but their voices were never invited to the conversation.



PHOTO IMAGE/Courtesy of FLOCK

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