

NORTHWEST ARKANSAS Democrat Gazette

Bentonville council approves policy for police body cameras

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The City Council on Tuesday night unanimously approved a body camera policy for the Police Department.

The policy directs officers and supervisors in the use and maintenance of body worn cameras, as well as directing how video will be used as a quality control mechanism and as evidence, according to City Council documents.

The policy is based upon model policies available to all state law-enforcement agencies by the Arkansas Association of Chiefs of Police. The policies were developed in partnership with numerous state agencies including the Arkansas Municipal League and the state Attorney General's Office, as well as the Arkansas Commission on Law Enforcement Standards and Training, according to council documents.

The policy states: "Officers shall activate the body-worn camera when such use is appropriate to the proper performance of his or her duties where the recordings are consistent with this policy and law."

The policy doesn't govern the use of recording devices in undercover operations or in-car-video covered under a separate policy or directive.

Body-worn camera activation is limited to situations involving official police activities authorized by law or court order, including consensual resident encounters and investigation of law violations. Officers are authorized to record events when the officer is a party to the conversation, or when an individual is in custody and there's generally no expectation of privacy, according to the policy.

Officers will make reasonable efforts to ensure the body-worn camera recording equipment is accurately capturing events. Officers are prohibited from turning off the camera during any resident contact or law enforcement event unless otherwise authorized by the policy. Officers shall not erase, alter, modify or tamper with body-worn camera recordings, according to the policy.

The effective date is Nov. 1.

The council at its July 14 approved a plan to buy 60 body cameras for \$182,450, which includes \$18,000 for data storage and \$30,000 for installation and setup costs.

The cameras will be issued to patrol division officers and can be integrated with the car dash cameras, Chief Jon Simpson said in July. About a dozen cameras will be kept in reserve for spares, he said.

According to a poll by the Cato Institute, 89% of Americans support requiring police officers to wear body cameras, while 11% are opposed.

The City Council also heard an appeal of a Planning Commission decision. Rainbow Homebuyers asked for the appeal. The commission recently voted 4-3 to deny a rezoning for property at 202-204 S.W. E St.

Rainbow Homebuyers sought a rezone from single-family residential to downtown medium-density residential. The council voted 6-2 to allow the rezoning.