

LITTLE VILLAGE

Independent Iowa News, Arts & Culture

LETTERS

Letter to the editor: Why I cannot support Flock cameras in Coralville

by **Letters**

Feb 23, 2026



A surveillance camera mounted on a light post along N Dubuque Street in Iowa City, just north of Mayflower Residence Hall. — Emma McClatchey/Little Village

By Hai Huynh, Coralville City Councilor

Last year, the contract to purchase Flock's automatic license plate readers (ALPRs) was signed as part of the City of Coralville's budget process — before most people even knew it was happening, and before we had even talked about it as a council. When the police chief later returned to the council seeking approval for Department of Transportation permits and installation, the public became aware of the issue through the agenda packet. People showed up. They asked hard questions and rightfully demanded transparency, accountability, and the right to consent.

I want to be clear: I deeply respect the hard work of our city staff and the Coralville Police Department. They serve our community with dedication and integrity. But I also take responsibility for not asking more questions earlier in the budget process. This experience has shown that the way contracts and budget items are presented to the council must improve. Council members need time, information and space to ask hard questions. We owe that to the people of Coralville.


Since ALPRs were first introduced, I have had reservations. And recent developments have only heightened those concerns. The Iowa Attorney General's Office has ordered Coralville to remove the section of our policy that prohibited use of our ALPR cameras solely for immigration enforcement. At the same time, proposed state legislation would force cities to cooperate with federal agencies, including ICE. This means data collected from our ALPRs could be used to track and harm our neighbors, especially those already feeling vulnerable. This is not theoretical. It is happening across the country, and it can happen here if we are not vigilant.

As an immigrant and naturalized citizen, I have felt less safe in recent years, despite having lived in the U.S. for more than three decades and building my life in Coralville. My children were born and are being raised here, yet even they are not insulated from the fear created by policies that disregard due process and target vulnerable communities. What we are seeing in neighboring cities and across the nation is a reminder that no community is immune. In a different political moment, ALPRs might be a helpful tool. But right now, when local control is being eroded and state officials are overriding community-driven safety measures, this is not a tool we can responsibly adopt. Supporting our police department does not mean approving every new piece of technology. It means making sure what we approve truly

keeps our neighbors safe.

We have heard from countless community members who are rightfully worried about privacy, consent, and civil liberties. We have watched the state strip away local authority and undermine the safeguards cities are trying to put in place. That is why I support bringing the Flock contract back to the table for a new vote to cancel. Thirty-six thousand dollars is not a small amount of money, especially given the many cuts to city funding sources. But it is certainly not worth a human life.

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I also believe the two cameras already installed should come down. Even if we cancel the contract, those cameras could still operate without local oversight. That is unacceptable. I will be requesting that the contract be placed on the February 24th, 2026 council agenda.

To our city staff and police department: thank you for your service and your commitment to

keeping Coralville safe. Your work matters deeply.

To the residents who spoke out: thank you for your courage. Your voices matter. Your concerns are valid. I'm listening and will keep advocating alongside you.

This is about more than cameras. It is about public trust, accountability, and the kind of community we want Coralville to be. If we do not stand up for privacy, local control, and basic civil liberties now, we may not get another chance.

