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Coralville to reconsider license plate reader cameras following policy concerns from Iowa Attorney General

Under current city rules, ALPRs can't be used "solely for immigration enforcement"



Megan Woolard

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A vehicle turns into the Lowe's parking in Cedar Rapids as a Flock Safety camera is seen at one of the entrances on Oct. 13, 2025. The cloud-connected cameras collect vehicle data like make, model and color as well as license plate information that law enforcement can access for investigations. (jim Slosiarek/The Gazette)

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CORALVILLE — The Coralville City Council will reconsider its use of automatic license plate reader cameras after the Iowa Attorney General's Office flagged the city's policy that limits the use of the cameras for immigration enforcement.

Instead of amending the policy to address the Attorney General's Office complaints and comply with state law, the city council plans to consider removing the cameras — supplied by Flock Safety — at its next council meeting later this month.

The city's use of the Flock cameras, which was approved last fall, has been controversial long before the Attorney General's Office stepped in. The city council, in a 3-2 vote in September, narrowly approved a use policy that allowed for camera implementation.

Since then, some Coralville residents have continued to express concerns about privacy and the use of data collected by the cameras to the city council.

The city council approved a budget last year that included \$18,000 for six cameras. The cameras were set to be

placed on First Avenue near Interstate 80, First Avenue near Highway 6, and Coral Ridge Avenue near Highway 6.

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Coralville moves forward with license plate reader cameras

The full contract with Flock Safety, which provides the cameras, is for \$36,000 over the course of two fiscal years. Should the council choose to remove the cameras, the city would still need to foot the bill.

The cameras are designed to give law enforcement agencies alerts when a vehicle identified through an Amber or Silver alert — issued to help authorities find missing children and adults — is detected. The cameras also save license plate numbers and other information about vehicles that pass by, running that information through a database of arrest warrants and missing vehicle reports.

The cameras are not traffic enforcement devices and cannot issue red-light or speed violations. However, the cameras may report a violation in order to dispatch an officer, or the information they collect may be shared with another jurisdiction, something community members expressed concerns about.

Flock Safety has said its cameras are meant to capture only license plates and vehicle characteristics — not photos of the occupants. The cameras also capture the make and model of vehicles, as well as dents or bumper stickers on the rear of the vehicle

Coralville ALPR use policy adopted last fall

The approved policy states that the ALPR system cannot be used solely based on “a person's race, gender, religion, political affiliation, nationality, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability, any other classification protected by law, for the purpose of or known effect of infringing on First Amendment rights.”

The Attorney General's Office complaint, that alleges the policy is a violation of state law, is about section 427.4.1(d) from policy 427 that states the flock cameras may not be used “Solely for immigration purposes.”

In a letter to the Coralville City Council, Solicitor General Eric Wessman wrote that removal of the section would “resolve the pending complaint in full.”

A Flock Safety license plate reading camera records the southbound lane of J Street SW in Cedar Rapids as a vehicle travels northbound on the street on March 4, 2025. (Jim Slosiarek/The Gazette)

Since Coralville's accepted use policy for the cameras was approved last year, the makeup of council has changed and the city has a new mayor.

Four council members — Katie Freeman, Royce Peterson, Hai Huynh and Mike Knudsen — have asked for the issue to be brought back to council for another vote.

Huynh and Knudsen voted against implementation of the cameras last year, while Peterson, council member Rich Vogelzang and now-mayor Laurie Goodrich voted in favor.

"I'll say that when I voted for the Flock stuff, I was on the fence from the beginning," Peterson said. "... I also feel that the way it sits right now that, and with the way the state keeps continuing to take away local control from our cities and our counties continuously. ... if this would have been the way it was back when we voted I wouldn't have voted."

Freeman was not a member of council at the time of the vote, but spoke out against the use of Flock cameras during the implementation process.

At the time of the last vote, both Knudsen and Huynh said concerns expressed by residents weren't adequately addressed by Flock Safety for them to be comfortable moving forward with implementing the cameras.

"If the political climate had been different, this might be a great tool for our (police department) and to say no to this technology does not mean that we don't support our (police department). We support them, but support comes in many ways. ... So at this time, I don't think this technology is right for us, and I will be in favor to bring the

Hai Huynh, Coralville City Council. (Submitted photo)

contract back to the table to have a vote," said Huynh.

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