

LITTLE VILLAGE

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LETTERS

Letter to the editor: Connect the dots and join the resistance against Flock and the surveillance network

by **Letters**

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A Flock automated license plate reader camera. — Paul Brennan/Little Village

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When Ring advertised their new AI-powered Search Party function during the Super Bowl as a solution for finding lost dogs, people were **rightfully concerned**. “No matter how Ring and other surveillance tech companies may downplay it, there’s no world in which finding lost dogs is the final end-use for this technology,” **Hayes Brown wrote** in a recent MSNow article, “Ring is using lost dogs to make the surveillance state adorable.”

In both Iowa City and Coralville, as well as **nationally**, the use of Flock ALPRs (automated license plate readers) has been under increased scrutiny. These Flock cameras are similar to Ring doorbells in that they capture whatever appears in front of them but the AI technology behind Flock’s cameras is what has people all over the country concerned. Automated license plate readers are just one of many AI powered surveillance tools. Now, with Search Party, it’s on your doorbell camera, too.

The concerns over Ring and Flock are part of the larger conversation about the dangers of AI-powered mass surveillance. Just like it’s obvious that Ring’s Search Party can be used to identify more than dogs, it should be obvious that Flock’s ALPRs can be used to identify more than license plates.

Flock says that municipalities have control over who can access their local data, but **cities across the country** are cancelling their Flock contracts or questioning the security of their Flock camera data, as either police departments themselves have been found to be providing access to unauthorized agencies, or in the case of Mountain View, California, city officials found that the nationwide search setting had been turned on without their permission, violating state law.

Unlike California, Iowa law requires local municipalities to cooperate with federal immigration enforcement. We know that the data collected in our community by Flock’s cameras can be used by federal immigration enforcement, regardless of our local data sharing policy. A majority of Coralville’s city council acknowledges the danger of this

reality.

Coralville residents have made it clear we do not want Flock's AI powered surveillance cameras in our community. As soon as the Flock contract, signed last May without city council's approval, was made public in July, residents have been pleading with city council to cancel it. The Flock contract wasn't on the agenda at the Coralville City Council meeting on Feb. 10, even after it was discovered that Iowa Solicitor General Eric H. Wessan directed Coralville to change its policy regarding sharing images and data from its Flock cameras in order to comply with a state law requiring cities to share data requested by federal immigration agencies, but residents packed the city council chambers to ask once again for the termination of Coralville's contract with Flock over concerns for the safety of Coralville's immigrant community.

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

In response to public comments, four of the five councilors and Mayor Laurie Goodrich

expressed a desire at the Feb. 10 work session to stop prolonging this decision and put cancelling the Flock contract on a future agenda.

We agree and thereby propose more specifically that Mayor Goodrich places an item on the agenda for the next council meeting on Feb. 24 for council to vote on canceling Coralville's contract with Flock.

To add your name to the dynamic list on our website coralvilleflock.org of people requesting the immediate cancellation of the city of Coralville's contract with Flock, email us at deflockcoralville@proton.me

We also urge community members to share their opinions with Mayor Goodrich, with all five members of Coralville City Council, and with city administrator Kelly Hayworth and Police Chief Kyle Nicholson by utilizing the contact information that is posted on the city website coralville.org.

