

-FLOCK

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citizen requests about privacy, constitutional rights, and how information collected by the cameras is used.

The discussion began when Melody Shanaberger approached the court and immediately asked, “Have you turned off the Flock cameras yet?”

Hart County Judge/Executive Joe Choate turned the question over to Hart County Sheriff Jeff Wilson, who confirmed the cameras remain in operation.

“The sheriff’s department researched Flock cameras prior to ever installing them or getting them,” Sheriff Wilson said. “The sheriff’s department is responsible for getting the Flock cameras. Currently, the Flock cameras are on.”

Sheriff Wilson said the department signed a three-year contract for the cameras and will evaluate their usefulness during that period.

“If they turn out to be beneficial, then we will look at something after that,” Sheriff Wilson said. “If not, at the end of that three-year contract, it’ll be done away with.”

Addressing how information collected by the cameras is handled, Sheriff Wilson said the data is currently retained for 30 days, although that period could potentially be shortened.

“The information that is taken from the Flock cameras is not sold to a third party,” Sheriff Wilson added. “It’s not something which we can disseminate or sell.”

Sheriff Wilson also stated that access to the system requires officers to document why it is being used.

“Before we use that system at the sheriff’s department, or any of the other agencies that are participating, we have to type in a case number, a citation, or a reason that we’re using them,” Sheriff Wilson explained. “Any information that we get from that is basically an investigative tool. We have to further investigate before any of that information is used to continue that investigation.”

Sheriff Wilson also said the cameras do not single out a person, but rather identify a vehicle that may give investigators reason to look further.

Despite the sheriff’s explanation, Shanaberger’s position remained unchanged.

“I still want to get rid of

them,” she said. “And I’m not the only one.”

Gordon Wright followed Shanaberger before the court, raising what he described as “a lot of Fourth Amendment problems with the Flock cameras.”

“I’d like to know what I’m being investigated for because I suppose I’ve gone by a Flock camera, and I’ve had my license plate photographed, and I’m not aware that I’m being investigated for anything,” Wright said.

Wright’s concerns centered not only on the initial collection of license plate information, but also on what could be done with previously collected information if someone later became the subject of an investigation.

“They’re able to hold onto this evidence, and then - and I’m not putting anybody down - but if they cook up in their mind that this person is a problem, then they can go back and find evidence on them, and that’s not the way our system’s supposed to work,” Wright said. “That’s a problem. I have a problem with that.”

Judge Choate said he believed Sheriff Wilson had explained the safeguards concerning case numbers before allowing the sheriff to further respond to Wright.

“It’s not that we’re just randomly looking at people or trying to see what random people are doing,” Sheriff Wilson said. “We have to have a reason to look into that. And then that reason is documented within the system.”

Sheriff Wilson acknowledged the possibility that technology could be misused, but said safeguards are in place within his department.

“Now, if you ask me, will there be somebody who misuses it somewhere? Possibly, sure,” Sheriff Wilson said. “That’s the case with any tool or information. But I can assure you that we have steps in place that we’re not going to misuse that.”

“I would love if you come talk to me, and I could sit down and show you anything that you want to know about the system, about anything that we’re doing, any of our policies, any of our procedures,” Sheriff Wilson continued in an acknowledgement to Wright. “If there’s anything that you would like to see, you just call me and come



▲ PHOTO | SCREENSHOT
Harold Cottrell held up his cell phone as he addressed officials during last week’s Fiscal Court meeting. Cottrell used his cell phone to illustrate the role data centers play in storing and processing information, and encouraged officials to study the issue as the county prepares for future discussions on data centers and zoning.

by, and we’ll sit down and show you.”

Wright said he would do so, but continued by raising concerns about the county’s contractual relationship with Flock and asking who installs the cameras and whether their installation is monitored for compliance with applicable laws. Sheriff Wilson responded that it is.

Donnie Troyer spoke next, continuing the public discussion by focusing his comments on government power, individual rights, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights.

“We don’t all think the same, vote the same, or live the same,” Troyer said. “That’s the beauty of the United States of America. There’s one thing we should all stand on if we want to continue to live the American way of life: the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. Those rights belong to every American, especially when we don’t see eye to eye.”

Troyer said the limits placed on government by the nation’s founders were intended to protect ordinary citizens, while also maintaining the ability to provide for safe communities.

“Our founders put hard limits on government power, not to protect criminals, but to protect ordinary people,” Troyer said. “We can want safe communities and still expect government to follow the Constitution and Bill of Rights.”

Troyer, who identified himself as a member of the Amish community, questioned whether his community had been adequately included in discussions surrounding the technology.

“You all say you represent everyone in this community...If that were the case, you would think someone who was here would have made the effort to contact someone in the community to explain



▲ PHOTO | SCREENSHOT
Melody Shanaberger spoke before Hart County Fiscal Court, where she opened her remarks by asking whether the Flock cameras had been turned off. After Sheriff Jeff Wilson confirmed the cameras remain in use and explained the department’s policies surrounding the system, Shanaberger maintained her opposition, telling the court, “I still want to get rid of them. And I’m not the only one.”

much light on this topic. We have heard rumors of people saying things like, ‘Everything watches you, your phone, your TV, social media, so it’s no big deal that one more thing is watching you.’ What about the ones that don’t have these? Do we not matter? Do we not count when it comes to being part of the discussion of the community?”

Troyer said the phrase “Don’t tread on me” represents more to him than a bumper sticker on a vehicle.

“It means, by all means necessary, defend the people with the Constitution and the Bill of Rights,” Troyer said. “The Constitution and the Bill of Rights don’t

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print@jpinews.com

Michelle Rowe, President
Jobe Publishing
270-786-2676 Office
michelle.rowe@jpinews.com

Anissa Meredith, VP Operations
270-786-2676 Office
anissameredith@jpinews.com

Lesia Logsdon, VP Reader Services
270-786-2686 Office
lesialogsdon@jpinews.com

Pam Wright, VP Finances
270-786-2676 Office
pamwright@jpinews.com

Jessie Crabtree, VP Sales
270-590-8633
jcrabtree@jpinews.com

James Courtney Douglas
VP Production

THE CITIZEN-TIMES
31 Maple Street, Scottsville, KY 42164
270-237-3441
ctimes@nctc.com
Trisha Taylor - Acting General Manager

**BARREN COUNTY PROGRESS
GLASGOW OFFICE**
101 N. Public Square, Glasgow, KY 42141
270-659-2146 Office
progress@jpinews.com



**HART COUNTY NEWS-HERALD
HORSE CAVE OFFICE**
570 South Dixie St., Horse Cave, KY 42749
270-786-2676 Office
print@jpinews.com
Mary Beth Sallee, Managing Editor
marybeth@jpinews.com
Selena Gower - Sales, 270-786-2676

**EDMONSON COUNTY NEWS
BROWNSVILLE OFFICE**
109 E. Main Cross, Brownsville, KY 42210
270-597-3115 Office
ednews@windstream.net
Lynn Bledsoe, Reporter
Beverly Bonilla - Sales, 270-526-4151
sales@jpinews.com

**EDMONTON HERALD NEWS
EDMONTON OFFICE**
116 South Main St., Edmonton, KY 42129
270-432-3291
heraldnews@jpinews.com
P. J. Martin, Editor / Sales

CUMBERLAND COUNTY NEWS
412 Courthouse Square, Burkesville, KY 42717
270-864-3891 Office
ccn@burkesville.com
Greg Wells, Editor
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**RUSSELL COUNTY TIMES JOURNAL
RUSSELL SPRINGS OFFICE**
270-866-3191 Office; 270-866-3198 Fax
editor@russellcountynewspapers.com
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**BUTLER COUNTY BANNER/
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270-526-4151 Office
banner@jpinews.com
Beverly Bonilla - Office Manager
sales@jpinews.com

OHIO COUNTY TIMES-NEWS
314 Main Street, Hartford, KY 42347
270-298-7100
editor@oetimes.com

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