

State legislators discuss limits upon Flock cameras

BY BETH MUSGRAVE
TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

LEXINGTON — Several members of a key state legislative committee said they wanted to see additional safeguards on the use of license plate reader cameras, including requiring a warrant for the data to be accessed.

Other members of the Interim Joint Judiciary Committee said their constituents want the cameras banned.

The committee discussed the use of automated license plate readers camera, which are made by companies such as Flock. Legislators also heard testimony from police, a representative of Flock as well as the American Civil Liberties Union and the Cato Institute.

“Overwhelmingly, I am hearing that the very citizens that we serve do not want to be monitored and surveilled in this way,” said Rep. Savannah Maddox, R-Dry Ridge.

Rep. Jennifer Decker, R-Waddy, said her constituents in Shelby County also are opposed to the cameras.

“As these cameras multiply and as they become more technologically available for being searched, searchable and shareable, people are concerned that we could already be well down the road toward the kind of surveillance state that George Orwell warned about in his dystopian novel in ‘1984,’” Decker said.

Kevin Kane with Flock Safety told the committee that the business has made multiple changes to its system to guard against misuse. The devices only take pictures of license plates and do not use facial recognition, he said. The system now requires a reason for a search but also a case number, he said.

In addition, Flock does not share or sell that data to third parties. It’s up to the law enforcement agency to determine what agency it shares that information with.

Elizabethtown Police Chief Jeremy Thompson said the Kentucky Chiefs of Police see Flock cameras as a valuable law enforcement tool.

Flock cameras recently were

used to identify two suspects in the shooting death of a 16-year-old Louisville girl. The cameras also identified and helped police find seven stolen vehicles obtained fraudulently from a Lexington car dealership, he said.

Thompson urged legislative leaders to allow law enforcement to continue to use the tool.

“This is almost identical technology as what we utilize to collect tolls on toll bridges,” Thompson said. “I’m telling you in nearly 30 years of law enforcement, this is the best piece of technology to assist law enforcement in real time to help solve crime, to make our citizens safer.”

Officials with the American Civil Liberties Union and the Cato Institute urged the legislators to consider additional safeguards, including requiring a warrant or creating a public database so that people can see if someone has searched for their vehicle.

“We would like independent agencies to provide annual and routine audits, and we would love for you all to have reporting every year or more often on the use of ALPRs,” said Kate Miller of the

ACLU.

Laura Bondank-Harmon of the Cato Institute also recommended audits and requiring police officers get warrants to access the data.

Rep. Jason Nemes, R-Middle-town, said he recognizes license plate readers are valuable for law enforcement.

“I don’t know why we wouldn’t require a warrant,” Nemes said. That would protect people’s Fourth Amendment rights not to be subject to unreasonable search and seizure. Nemes and others said a searchable database may also be an additional safeguard that would make people more comfortable with the technology.

Rep. Daniel Elliott, R-Danville, and co-chair of the Interim Judiciary Committee, agreed.

“I think that some reasonable safeguards and guardrails such as a warrant requirement with exigent circumstances would probably be something I could support,” Elliott said.

Sen. Danny Carroll, R-Paducah, who is also a former police officer, said he supports the cameras’ use.

“This is a tool that will save lives and solve crimes. And that’s the way we need to approach it,” Carroll said.

But, Carroll said, additional safeguards and changes may be needed.

Earlier this year, the General Assembly passed House Bill 58, which is now law, which restricts when license plate readers can be used, requires agencies to publish policies and set regular audits, limits data retention at 90 days and makes misuse of camera data a crime.

There is also movement on the federal level to curtail license plate reader cameras.

Northern Kentucky U.S. Rep. Thomas Massie, a Republican, said Thursday he will file a bill this week that would prohibit the use of federal funds to buy or maintain license plate reader and biometric surveillance cameras.

“The federal government shouldn’t provide ‘security’ grants to cities and police departments that have gone beyond the pale and turned their communities into a version of ‘1984,’” Massie said.

COUNCIL

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“C-N,” community neighborhood district.

The local contractor behind the plans, Nathan Merrell of Merrell Construction and Concepts, addressed the council, asking the council to consider hosting a special-called meeting to host the second reading and public hearing on the zoning changes.

Merrell noted that the proposal took nearly two hours when before the Planning and Zoning Commission between presentations, public comment and the commission’s discussion.

“Given where the city council was at its last meeting ... [until] 11:30 at night, I think it’s certainly possible that if this ordinance is put on a regular agenda we could probably see our city council member here in the morning hours,” Merrell said.

“And, of course above that, we want to hear all voices — whether you’re in opposition, whether you’re in favor of it, we want to provide an ample amount of time to hear all the voices, all the concerns,” Merrell said.

At the Planning and Zoning Commission meeting, some residents voiced their concerns regarding the limited parking spaces provided on the proposed business’ plans, and the reliance on nearby street parking.

Despite those parking concerns, the commission voted 8-4 to approve a parking waiver for the proposed boutique hotel — allowing the business to have 15 parking spaces instead of the 45 that normally would have been required.

The council does not have the authority to vote on the parking waiver, however, and can only vote to approve or deny the requested zoning changes.

Later in the meeting, the council decided not to schedule a special-called meeting to consider the matter, as the city’s bylaws require the council to declare an emergency to conduct second readings at special-called meetings.



Photo by Grant Gerstner

Nathan Merrell, of Merrell Construction and Concepts, addresses the La Grange City Council on Sept. 8 regarding his proposed boutique hotel and event hall. “We want to hear all voices — whether you’re in opposition, whether you’re in favor of it,” he said regarding the upcoming public hearing.

Instead, the council planned to host the second reading a public hearing at their Oct. 5 meeting.

HISTORIC DISTRICTS DISCUSSION

In other news, the council also heard from one resident regarding the Central La Grange Historic Districts.

Longtime resident and local attorney Valerie Shannon began by referencing “concerns” about the La Grange Historic Districts Commission and the possibility of changing or overturning the ordinance that created the historic districts.

“I understand that a kind of informal census was taken to find out that there is not the will or the votes in this council as it’s made up at this time to overturn the historic district ordinance or amend or take whatever actions this council is capable of doing,” Shannon said.

She also emphasized the importance of the enforcement of the historic districts’ guidelines: “If you gut the guidelines, you gut the ordinance ...”

Citing a report from the Brookings Institute, Shannon stated several ways the historic district benefits the city. Aside from the “priceless” historic and cultural value, she said that the historic districts bring economic benefits.

“We receive federal funding, certified local government funding [and]

Main Street America grants through the historic districts association ... People who are here qualify for up to 20% federal historic tax credits ...

“It has been demonstrated that the real estate market in historic districts stays more stable, is less prone to foreclosure and ... as properties are rehabilitated and overall district valuations rise, municipal ad valorem property tax revenues grow organically without necessitating a rate increase ...”

The council offered no immediate response to Shannon, but some council members referenced hearing from other individuals regarding the historic districts at their next meeting.

OTHER COUNCIL ACTIONS

The council also conducted a second reading and public hearing regarding an ordinance amending the county’s zoning regulations — specifically, those regarding qualified manufactured homes and golf driving ranges.

Planner I John Hine explained to the council that the change in the regulations on manufactured housing largely originated from a new state law that came into effect this summer, deeming that “qualified” manufactured homes must be allowed in any zoning classes where single-family “stick-build”

homes are permitted.

The new state law defines a “qualified” manufactured home as one that was manufactured at least five years prior to its installation date, is affixed to a permanent foundation, is at least 20 feet wide at its smallest measurement or is two stories tall, has a main entrance facing the street, and has a total living area of at least 900 square feet.

The state law does not circumvent deed-restricted neighborhoods that have barred manufactured housing, however.

Hine also explained that the changes in the regulations on golf driving ranges simply corrected a previous error, now allowing future driving ranges to have a 60-foot net rather than a 60-foot wall or fence.

The council also approved the reappoint-

ment of Jaime Bowling as well as the appointment of Sandy Hamilton and Bobby Bowling to the La Grange Tourism Commission for terms expiring on Sept. 1, 2029 for Jaime Bowling and Hamilton and Sept. 1, 2028 for Bobby Bowling.

The council also approved the reappointment of Tom Marsh to the Oldham County Planning and Zoning Commission for a term expiring Sept. 1, 2030, and the appointment of Greg Summer to the La Grange Code Enforcement Board for a term expiring Sept. 1, 2028.

The council also heard a report from the La Grange Utilities Commission.

As for projects that are underway, Josh Rahm reported that the sewers in Oldham Reserve are operational, and only punch-list items are left for the con-

tractor to finish. The water project in The Courts subdivision is 95% complete with about two or three weeks left before completion, and the water pressure valve project is 99% complete. Construction on the Allen Lane railroad underpass has begun.

Looking ahead, the projects for The Marquis Apartments and Dogwood Estates have been approved by the Division of Water, and the plans for the Parkside Estates project are under review. The 4th Street sewer line project — which will close one lane — is waiting on the contractor to mobilize for paving.

The La Grange City Council’s next meeting is scheduled for Oct. 5 at 6:30 p.m.

IMPORTANT DATES FOR UPCOMING ELECTION

Attention All Oldham County Voters:

The Oldham County Clerk’s Office wants to take this opportunity to inform all voters of upcoming election information.

For the upcoming election, I would like to remind the voters of their responsibility to make sure your address is correct in the Voter Registration Department of the Oldham County Clerk’s Office. If you have any questions, PLEASE call 222-0047 **BEFORE** Election Day.

There will be several ways to cast your ballot this Election Cycle.

1. Requesting an Absentee Ballot via mail by visiting GOVOTE.KY.GOV;
2. EXCUSED Voting October 21, 22, 23 and October 26, 27, 28, 2026 in the Oldham County Clerk’s LaGrange Office, 100 West Jefferson Street, during regular business hours for reasons outlined in KRS117.076(2);
3. No-Excuse Early Voting on Thursday, October 29th from 8am-6pm, Friday, October 30th from 8am-4pm and Saturday, October 31st from 6am-2pm at the John Black Center, 1551 N. Highway 393 in Buckner and Crestwood Temporary Courthouse (**NEW LOCATION**), 6822 Central Ave in Crestwood;
4. Election Day-November 3, 2026 at nine (9) County Wide Voting Centers from 6am-6pm

No matter where you live, you can vote at any of these centers:

Oldham County High School 1150 N Hwy 393, Buckner	LaGrange Baptist Church 1139 Commerce Pkwy, LaGrange
South Oldham Middle School 6403 W Hwy 146, Crestwood	Crestwood Temporary Courthouse (NEW) 6822 Central Avenue, Crestwood
North Oldham High School 1815 S Hwy 1793, Goshen	Goshen Elementary 12518 Ridgemoor Drive, Prospect
Westport Baptist Life Center 6415 Washington St., Westport	East Oldham Middle School 1201 E. Hwy 22, Crestwood
Pewee Valley Fire Station 1 8607 Foley Ave, Pewee Valley	

Please remember a valid KY ID is required to vote. For more information visit the County Clerk’s website: oldhamcountyclerk.ky.gov.

On September 17, 2026, 9AM, the Oldham County Board of Elections will travel to the South Oldham Government Center located at 6710 W. Hwy. 146 in Crestwood to examine the voting machines and determine whether the requirements of KRS 117.165 have been met.

Please do not hesitate to contact the Voter Registration Department at 222-0047 with any questions.

Amy B. Alvey, Oldham County Clerk

HISTORY

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was established (previously known as Crossroads) in 1827, a group of men wanted to move the county seat to La Grange, as it was more centrally located to its citizens. William Berry Taylor donated land for the courthouse square in La Grange, and a two-story brick courthouse with a gabled roof was constructed on the square. There was a wide community dispute over the shift of the county seat from Westport to La Grange.

Westport, being a thriving river port community, temporarily retained the

county seat until 1838. In 1838, the county seat permanently moved to La Grange. This is around the time when the railroad came through La Grange, and this caused the majority of Oldham County commerce to move from the river in Westport to the rails in La Grange.

The original Oldham County Courthouse in Westport is still standing today serving the Westport Methodist Church congregation.

Ann Cannon is the office manager at the Oldham County History Center. This the ninth of a 12-month series on behalf of the Oldham County History Center publishing this year around the United States of America’s 250th birthday.