

Selectmen Approve Police Body Cameras

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The Darien Board of Selectmen on Monday unanimously approved spending \$87,000 for body cameras to be worn regularly by 48 town police officers after hearing that police-public relations have become more tense and the state may pay the full cost of the program's first year.

The proposal now goes before the Board of Finance and then the Representative Town Meeting (which doesn't meet until September) before the town can purchase the cameras and the more expensive digital storage and retrieval system for the videos.

"The heightened state of tension that now exists surrounding law enforcement has reached a level not seen in my 34 years as a police officer," Police Chief Duane Lovello told the board in a prepared statement. "We have seen some horrible footage of police misconduct occurring from other parts of the country."

See also:

- [Police Chief's Statement to Board of Selectmen in Support of Police Body Cameras](#) (Aug. 8)
- [Board of Selectmen May Approve Police Body Cameras Monday Night](#) (with a Police Department Power Point presentation on the proposal; Aug. 7)

Darien TV79 [announced](#) it will have a full video of the Board of Selectman meeting posted on the Internet by Tuesday.

While Darien police are very professional, the chief said, and police in Connecticut are some of the best trained in the country, "a hallmark of any profession is a willingness to hold its work out for public scrutiny."

The entire first year of funding may be paid for through a state grant that, if it's implemented, would be available to Darien and other communities, Lovello said.

State officials have said the town is eligible for the grant, he said, but it isn't certain that the grant program will be financed this fiscal year. A maximum of \$15 million has been authorized for the program, but as Lovello understands it, state officials "have to reach a certain threshold" of proposed grant disbursements before a bonding proposal is brought before the state's bonding authority.

A video (and audio) recording from a police officer's body camera isn't going to be a perfect record of an incident, Lovello said (an earlier Power Point presentation to the board gave a detailed explanation of that), but it will provide the police with more information and more accurate information for investigations.

When controversies about police conduct occur, he said, it will provide the public with more accurate information. For instance, police will be recording incidents much earlier than members of the public might start recording with their cell phones, he said.

The cost of the five-year program will be \$64,500 a year for the second through fifth years. Two and a half years into the program, and again in the fifth year, the equipment will be upgraded with more modern technology that may then be available, Lovello said.

Lovello is now acting chairman of a state board of professionals who set statewide standards for police practices. He said body cameras for police officers is "evolving into best practices" for the profession.

Asked what the officers in the department think about body cameras, Lovello said that they've become much more popular. "I do think that the vast majority of the officers do see the advantage of having a camera on," he said. Younger officers who tend to be more familiar with social media than older officers, are even more supportive of body cameras, he said.

First Selectman Jayme Stevenson asked whether or not the school resource officer at Darien High School, a police officer assigned to work in the school, would have a body camera. That officer would, Lovello said, but privacy concerns for students would need to be respected, so much of the time the camera would be off. A policy for that would be worked out with the superintendent of schools, he said.

Asked whether or not the police constables who work for the Tokeneke Association would need to wear body cameras, Lovello said that would have to be worked out with the leaders of the association.

Although the state grant is for departments that make wearing of body cameras almost universal among police officers, Lovello said he thought the constables working in Tokeneke were classified differently in state law, so that requirement would not apply to them.

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