



Downtown Public Safety Grant MOU Informational Report:

RS2025-1659

Prepared by the Metro Nashville Community Review Board

An informational report on the Downtown Public Safety Grant MOU, which could impact the Metro Nashville Police Department.

Introduction

On January 20th, 2026, Nashville Metropolitan Council will vote on the approval of RS2025-1659¹ a resolution which would approve a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Metropolitan Government of Nashville and Davidson County and the Nashville Downtown Partnership (NDP) regarding NDP's application for the Downtown Public Safety Grant (DPSG) from the State of Tennessee².

Announced on October 2nd by Governor Bill Lee, the DPSG grant fund is intended to support public safety and economic development initiatives in 4 cities across Tennessee. The Nashville Downtown Partnership has been awarded the full \$15 million in funds intended for Nashville. However, the rules for grant eligibility stipulate that any Business Improvement District Management Corporation receiving the grant must coordinate with the city's local government and Business Improvement District (BID) to determine how the funds will be implemented. Thus, the MOU agreement between Metro and NDP would 1) establish that the Metro Government will not submit a competing application for the grant and 2) limits the expenditure of grant funds to a specific, approved-upon list of uses. Although NDP is the grant recipient, the nonprofit corporation included in their application a proposal for \$9 million of the funds to be allocated to Metro Government and the

¹ <https://nashville.legistar.com/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=7764766&GUID=8999F28A-6623-4AB9-9CB9-280496832976&Options=ID|Text|&Search=RS2025-1659>

² <https://nashville.legistar.com/ViewReport.ashx?M=R&N=Text&GID=787&ID=6575431&GUID=084F36AE-4513-4E71-8158-77CDCDFB4DC2&Title=Legislation+Text>

Metropolitan Nashville Police Department (MNPd) for downtown technology upgrades, equipment, and capital projects³.

Importantly, approval of RS2025-1659 by the Metro Council would not constitute an agreement as to precisely how the funds will be spent. For instance, Section 13.08.080 of the Metropolitan Code of Laws requires any potential surveillance technology that the city may acquire to go before the Metro Council for approval.⁴ Further, many of the tools and resources included in NDP's list of intended use of funds require local government approval before they can be placed in public rights-of-way, and would effectively be defunct without an MOU with a local law enforcement agency.

According to the proposed allocation of funds, MNPd is expected to receive a portion of that money for the purchase of a new armored vehicle, upgrades to existing downtown surveillance technology, and potential purchase of additional surveillance technologies. For instance, the original MOU included contracts with two different surveillance technology companies, LeoSight and Fivecast (both of which have since been removed from the agreement).

While NDP is the organization often promoted as the grant recipient, the official recipient is the Nashville District Management Corporation (DMC), a separate 501(c)(3)⁵ which oversees the operations of the BID. As a quasi-governmental organization, DMC's annual budget is subject to review and approval by Metro Council. NDP, on the other hand, is an entirely private 501(c)(6), or a non-profit business league. As such, they may receive funding from Metro but their annual budget is not subject to any democratic oversight. NDP essentially performs the operational tasks of the DMC pertaining to ensuring public safety and maintaining the cleanliness/beautification of the downtown area.

³ <https://www.newschannel5.com/news/safety-or-surveillance-15m-downtown-nashville-plan-sparks-debate>

⁴ <https://www.nashville.gov/sites/default/files/2023-01/License-Plate-Reader-Pilot-Program-Ordinance.pdf?ct=1673289099#:~:text=C.,use%20by%20the%20entity,%20and>

⁵ https://readrichtext.substack.com/p/the-surveillance-mou-leaked-records?utm_source=share&utm_medium=android&r=2112f&triedRedirect=true

Legislative History

The resolution was originally filed and referred to the Public Health and Safety and the Budget and Finance subcommittees on November 25, 2025, with councilmembers Kyonzte Tombs, Jordan Huffman, and Courtney Johnston sponsoring the legislation. Metro Council's Public Health and Safety subcommittee discussed RS2025-1659 for the first time on December 3rd.⁶ The Committee unanimously agreed to defer further discussion by one meeting.

On December 16th, three amendments were approved in the PH&S committee meeting and one other late-filed amendment was issued before general council convened that evening. See discussion of these amendments below (in Amendments). During the PH&S meeting that day, four members of the public spoke against RS2025-1659 during the public comment period. In the general Metro Council meeting, six councilmembers spoke against the resolution as well, and ultimately the Council voted to defer the resolution by one meeting (with a 19-17-0 final vote).

Additionally, during the January 20, 2026, council meeting, there will be four additional resolutions as well that pertain to specific items that NDP plans to donate to MNPD. The resolutions are: RS2026-1733⁷, which allocates \$150,000 for 15 video cameras; RS2026-1734⁸, which allocates \$430,000 for an armored vehicle; RS2026-1735⁹, which allocates \$2 million for a mobile command post; and RS2026-1736¹⁰, which allocates \$800,000 for a tactical support post.

Downtown Public Safety Grant

On October 2nd, Governor Bill Lee issued a press release announcing the Downtown Public Safety Grant, a new \$100 million grant fund to help “increase public safety, reduce

⁶ <https://nashville.legistar.com/ViewReport.ashx?M=R&N=Master&GID=787&ID=7764766&GUID=8999F28A-6623-4AB9-9CB9-280496832976&Title=Legislation+Details>

⁷ <https://nashville.legistar.com/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=7803300&GUID=1E0E06C8-E32C-4195-8741-3E89D0F62F93>

⁸ <https://nashville.legistar.com/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=7803301&GUID=3097B88D-87C5-4975-806B-94CEC22E5433>

⁹ <https://nashville.legistar.com/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=7803302&GUID=1494BF77-A035-4A12-87A8-9E808703B84E>

¹⁰ <https://nashville.legistar.com/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=7803303&GUID=8E7CB6C8-9F11-43E6-BBDF-0F0D879AF77D>

blight, enhance economic development infrastructure, and reduce crime in downtown business and commercial areas”.¹¹ Local government entities, Business Improvement Districts (BIDs), and/or BID Management Corporations in four cities (Chattanooga, Knoxville, Memphis, and Nashville) were eligible for the fund and encouraged to apply by October 24, 2025. The precise allocation of funds for each city was predetermined by the Office of Criminal Justice Programs, with Chattanooga eligible for \$4.46 million, Knoxville for \$4.94 million, Memphis for \$74.07 million, and Nashville for \$15.03 million¹².

The projected funding plan for the MOU allocates the following funding to MNPD:

Item	Funds	Family
Video Safety Camera Replacement	\$150,000	Technology Upgrades
Noise Detecting Cameras	\$900,000	Technology Upgrades
Community Safety Center Expansion	\$2,100,000	Technology Upgrades
End-User Computing Devices	\$591,000	Technology Upgrades
Armored Rescue Vehicle	\$430,000	Equipment
Mobile Command Post	\$2,000,000	Equipment
Tactical Support Post	\$800,000	Equipment

Nashville Downtown Partnership

The NPD is a private non-profit management corporation in Nashville that aims to make Nashville a compelling urban center in the Southeast to live, work, play, and invest¹³. Their main focuses are business recruitment and retention, residential and retail development, public space management, access and transportation, and communications and marketing for downtown destinations.

NPD is most recognizable through their “Downtown Ambassadors” who wear yellow shirts and ride segways downtown. Downtown Ambassadors largely focus on keeping downtown Nashville clean and safe, typically by carrying out services that supplement

¹¹ <https://www.tn.gov/governor/news/2025/10/2/gov--lee-announces--175-million-in-grant-funds-to-strengthen-public-safety-across-tennessee.html>

¹² <https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/finance/ocjp/DPSG%20Municipality%20Allocations.pdf>

¹³ <https://nashvilledowntown.com/about>

those of Metro Nashville¹⁴. These employees are funded in large part by a special tax assessment that both commercial and residential property owners pay, starting in 1999¹⁵.

Although NDP Downtown Ambassadors are not law enforcement officers, they are able to communicate directly with MNPd through a direct-link system, which has prompted criticism that NDP represents a “shadow police force” targeting homeless individuals downtown.^{16,17} Additionally, Solaren, the primary security company contracted under NDP¹⁸ has previously received 62 violations from the State of Tennessee for allowing “imposter cops” (employees who were not state-certified police) to work wearing police identification and using red and blue lights in non-police vehicles¹⁹.

Technology Overview

LeoSight

On its website, LeoSight advertises that LeoSight can bridge the gap between different law enforcement agencies and jurisdictions²⁰. In Nashville, that would connect MNPd with the Nashville Fire Department (NFD) and the Office of Emergency Management (OEM)²¹.

Fivecast

Fivecast is an open-source data collection software that allows local law enforcement agencies to collect data, identify threats, and investigate crimes²². On its website, Fivecast advertises that it has over 8 billion personal records in its database²³. This database also includes individual social security numbers²⁴. Furthermore, Fivecast has the capability of connecting social media accounts with the collected social security numbers,

¹⁴ <https://nashvilledowntown.com/services/clean-and-safe>

¹⁵ <https://wpln.org/post/curious-nashville-why-downtown-has-segway-riding-ambassadors-and-what-they-do/>

¹⁶ <https://wpln.org/post/curious-nashville-why-downtown-has-segway-riding-ambassadors-and-what-they-do/>

¹⁷ <https://www.wsmv.com/2025/05/29/shadow-police-force-removing-homeless-downtown-nashville-state-trooper-says/>

¹⁸ https://www.nashvillescene.com/news/citylimits/downtown-homelessness-business-improvement-district/article_b14a433c-3eb9-4848-9739-c350dde2cfbf.html

¹⁹ <https://www.wsmv.com/2024/07/02/state-issues-62-violations-against-company-accused-allowing-imposter-cops-nashville-streets/>

²⁰ <https://www.leosight.com/solutions>

²¹ https://www.youtube.com/live/QA7bbYgYeZg?si=FK5UiNSSMb1ZQU_H&t=2633

²² <https://www.youtube.com/live/QA7bbYgYeZg?si=WIGGnzhtXQ1w8eJ9&t=2655>

²³ <https://www.fivecast.com/news/open-source-intelligence-tools-for-better-intelligence-investigations/>

²⁴ <https://www.404media.co/ai-surveillance-tool-dhs-cbp-sentiment-emotion-fivecast/>

to gather and collect personalized data and information for each person's unique social security number²⁵. Furthermore, Fivecast advertises that it has "emotion detection" software²⁶, that utilizes artificial intelligence (AI), to examine language structures, facial patterns, and more to create "emotional readings" with the data gathered across platforms²⁷.

Non-Profit/Police Surveillance in other Cities

While Nashville has long-standing legislation that any surveillance technology to be implemented by the city must go before city council²⁸, other cities across the country (e.g. Atlanta, New Orleans) have opted to partner with non-profit organizations to circumvent their respective city councils to adopt police surveillance technologies²⁹.

In Atlanta, the Atlanta Police Foundation (APF), a non-profit organization with close ties to the Atlanta Police Department (APD), has created Connect Atlanta and operation Shield, which incorporate surveillance technologies into the city, including FUSUS and Talitrix^{30,31,32}.

In New Orleans, Project NOLA, a non-profit, built a surveillance apparatus of over 200 cameras^{33,34}. Furthermore, Project NOLA was using facial recognition technology with those cameras and sending the data to the New Orleans Police Department (NOPD)³⁵, which is a violation of the City of New Orleans's ordinance 35,137³⁶, a 2022 city council ordinance that restricts facial recognition technology to be used only for specific cases involving violent crime³⁷.

²⁵ <https://www.vice.com/en/article/dhs-uses-ai-tool-babel-x-babel-street-social-media-citizens-refugees/?ref=404media.co>

²⁶ <https://www.404media.co/ai-surveillance-tool-dhs-cbp-sentiment-emotion-fivecast/>

²⁷ <https://www.fivecast.com/industry-segments/border-security/>

²⁸ <https://www.nashville.gov/sites/default/files/2023-01/License-Plate-Reader-Pilot-Program-Ordinance.pdf?ct=1673289099#:~:text=C..use%20by%20the%20entity:%20and>

²⁹ <https://truthout.org/articles/a-nashville-proposal-could-outsource-surveillance-and-policing-to-a-nonprofit/>

³⁰ <https://atlantapolicefoundation.org/programs/operation-shield/>

³¹ [https://www.stopspying.org/our-vision#:~:text=The%20Surveillance%20Technology%20Oversight%20Project%20\(S.T.O.P.\)%20is,color%20*%20Anti%20Black%20policing%20*%20Technological%20advancements](https://www.stopspying.org/our-vision#:~:text=The%20Surveillance%20Technology%20Oversight%20Project%20(S.T.O.P.)%20is,color%20*%20Anti%20Black%20policing%20*%20Technological%20advancements)

³² <https://atlpresscollective.com/2024/04/01/atlanta-police-foundation-pushed-unprecedented-surveillance-plan/>

³³ <https://truthout.org/articles/a-nashville-proposal-could-outsource-surveillance-and-policing-to-a-nonprofit/>

³⁴ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2025/05/19/live-facial-recognition-police-new-orleans/>

³⁵ <https://boltsmag.org/new-orleans-live-facial-recognition-and-immigration/>

³⁶ https://cityofno.granicus.com/MetaViewer.php?view_id=&event_id=24201&meta_id=745559

³⁷ https://cityofno.granicus.com/MetaViewer.php?view_id=&event_id=23305&meta_id=593097

Furthermore, in Atlanta³⁸, facial recognition technology from New Orleans³⁹ led to the false arrests and imprisonment of Randla Reid, a Black man, who was mis-identified via the technology, despite having never been in Louisiana. He spent nearly a week in jail, after Louisiana Law enforcement officials mistakenly used facial recognition technology to link him to a theft he physically could not have committed⁴⁰.

Potential Risks

While surveillance technologies like LeoSight and Fivecast have the potential to enhance public safety, there are also risks associated with expanding surveillance technology, particularly as it pertains to privacy, consent, and civil liberties. Constant surveillance and filming of individuals in both public and private spaces can constitute a legal grey area with respect to 1st and 4th Amendment Constitutional rights. According to the US Department of Justice, surveillance that restricts freedoms of expression, speech, or movement, or that is used for an unreasonable or unwarranted search can be considered violations of 1st and 4th Amendment rights, respectively⁴¹.

LeoSight and Fivecast also carry specific risks due to their specific technologies. Both technologies use AI⁴², which carries inherent risks around data security and ownership. Furthermore, both technologies have been rebranding away from facial recognition technology to use other language terms that are “less aggressive”, like Fivecast’s “emotional detection” capabilities. However, in essence these technologies are still facial recognition programs, which have a history of being discriminatory⁴³ and are also prohibited for Mero to use via ordinance 13.08.080⁴⁴. LeoSight’s ability to cross jurisdiction and agency⁴⁵, is also concerning, as legally MNPd and other law enforcement agencies must have a court-appointed subpoena to share information with each other. Fivecast

³⁸ <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/03/31/technology/facial-recognition-false-arrests.html>

³⁹ https://www.nola.com/news/crime_police/jpsa-used-facial-recognition-to-arrest-a-man-it-was-wrong/article_0818361a-8886-11ed-8119-93b98ecccc8d.html

⁴⁰ <https://www.the-independent.com/news/world/americas/crime/louisiana-police-facial-recognition-lawsuit-b2419085.html>

⁴¹ <https://law.justia.com/constitution/us/amendment-04/26-electronic-surveillance-and-the-fourth-amendment.html>

⁴² <https://www.fivecast.com/industry-segments/border-security/>

⁴³ <https://sciencepolicy.hsites.harvard.edu/blog/racial-discrimination-face-recognition-technology>

⁴⁴ <https://www.nashville.gov/sites/default/files/2023-01/License-Plate-Reader-Pilot-Program-Ordinance.pdf?ct=1673289099#:~:text=C.,use%20by%20the%20entity,%20and>

⁴⁵ <https://www.leosight.com/solutions>

carries risks associated with protecting the privacy of individuals' social security numbers^{46,47}.

Finally, there are several concerns related to these technologies being permitted as acceptable purchases under a grant administered by a private agency. If NDP purchased these technologies to give to MNPd to use, who would own the data or have access to it? Could the data be sold? What would data retention and public records look like? Would there be any guardrails in place prior to implementation?

Amendments

Amendment A

This amendment⁴⁸ deletes the existing MOU and replaces it with an amended one, focused on collaboration between Metro Nashville and the NDP. The amended MOU clarifies that any future surveillance technology purchases or donations from this MOU would have to go before council as of Metro Code 13.08.080. It also clarifies that the grant spending will be limited to what is included in the agreement, instead of just limited by it. Furthermore, it ensures that any amendment to the MOU must be made in writing after agreement between the parties.

Amendment B

This amendment⁴⁹ is the second version of council member Sepulveda's 1st amendment⁵⁰. However, the 2nd supersedes the first, council only voted on the 2nd version, which passed. This amendment removes LeoSight and Fivecast from the MOU, by removing the two line items for CSC Software.

⁴⁶ <https://www.404media.co/ai-surveillance-tool-dhs-cbp-sentiment-emotion-fivecast/>

⁴⁷ <https://www.vice.com/en/article/dhs-uses-ai-tool-babel-x-babel-street-social-media-citizens-refugees/?ref=404media.co>

⁴⁸ <https://nashville.legistar.com/View.ashx?M=F&ID=15030980&GUID=A97D935F-4512-46C9-A2F5-725EAACC8B0F>

⁴⁹ <https://nashville.legistar.com/View.ashx?M=F&ID=15073745&GUID=CC76A5A0-0EF8-4A55-91C8-6D4C5F0A7F32>

⁵⁰ <https://nashville.legistar.com/View.ashx?M=F&ID=15032800&GUID=4DB48D49-CAF1-4AC4-ABFA-44713AB02BFA>

Amendment C

This amendment⁵¹ clarifies the exact name of the parties involved, specifically so that the DMC is included by name in the MOU since they are the organization that is technically receiving the money, and since Metro Nashville has oversight over their budget. It also details the planned expenditures for the \$15 million, including the budget for each line item listed. Regarding MNPd, this amendment clarifies that there will be \$2.1 million allocated for Community Safety Center upgrades, \$150,000 for replacement video cameras, \$591,000 for end-user computing devices, \$415,000 for the armored rescue vehicle, \$2 million for a mobile command post for events, \$800,000 for a tactical support post, and \$900,000 for noise cameras. This amendment also specifies that NDP does not intend to own or operate any of the above items, and that MNPd would be the sole operator of any donated technology.

This amendment also clarifies that, outside of the donations to MNPd, NDP also intends to spend approximately \$1.5 million on improved lighting and a lighting study; \$3.2 million on homeless outreach; \$270,000 on additional safety ambassadors and equipment; \$2.5 million on a Downtown Traffic Center buildout; \$1.2 million on six new public bathrooms to be donated to Metro Parks and Recreation Department

Conclusion

The NCRB presents this report to increase transparency, communication, and trust with the community regarding all surveillance technologies that Metro Nashville may adopt. Should Metro eventually enter contracts with LeoSight, Fivecast, or any other police surveillance technologies, members of the public have a right to understand what these new technologies entail, considering that they are the ones who are being surveilled. Public forums informing community members about these technologies and demonstrating them within the Community Safety Center could significantly increase transparency and trust with MNPd with respect to these programs. Additionally, collaboration with an independent

⁵¹ <https://nashville.legistar.com/View.ashx?M=F&ID=15073746&GUID=35EFC6E0-3700-43F4-BC9E-807FD4E289A5>

agency like the NCRB on Metro Surveillance audits could substantially improve public perceptions of Metro's commitment to trust, accountability, and transparency.