



EFF-Austin

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Community Groups ask Council for Additional Delay on Taser Contract

Austin Police Commander Ely Reyes and community representatives met Tuesday to discuss several proposed changes to the body camera policy. Reyes told the group that no issues related to transparency and public disclosure of video could be discussed at the meeting and suggested a different meeting would be needed.

"We made some progress. We were able to clarify that Austin is adopting body cameras in order to improve community relations, foster accountability and deter inappropriate conduct by both members of the public and the police force," said Carly Rose Jackson of Texans for Accountable Government.

"Our coalition got assurance that none of the video footage will be subjected to facial recognition scanning or other biometric data collection," said Alex Shahrestani, EFF-Austin. "But we were disappointed that all discussion of public release, even release to parents of minor children or people directly involved in an event, was pushed to another meeting. Technology is being quickly adopted as a tool for law enforcement, and we should embrace it. Granting strong public access to records created by BWCs improves both public and police accountability, and strengthens the community as a whole."

"We were disappointed that the key negotiators for the City were called downtown to the City Council work session, and forced to leave the meeting early," said Fatima Mann, Austin Justice Coalition. "We won't really know whether we made progress, or how much progress, until we see the changes we believe we've already negotiated actually written in black and white as in a new draft. We cannot help but wonder, if at the upcoming public disclosure meeting, they will be willing to work as easily with us as we are willing to work with them."

The coalition groups recommend that Council postpone the vote on the contract with Taser another short window to allow the second meeting on transparency to convene.