City Heights park to get cameras; Two to be installed to help fight crime
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Two surveillance cameras will be installed at City Heights Community Park this month, marking the first time San Diego police will use the technology to help reduce crime.

The local philanthropic group Price Charities, through the San Diego Police Foundation, provided $50,000 to purchase and install two wireless devices and related equipment.

"This is a great opportunity for our city," City Councilman Brian Maienschein said. "The cameras will provide good protection for our citizens."

Maria Cortez, president of the Teralta West Neighborhood Alliance, also praised the effort.

"We have problems of prostitution, gangs and graffiti," she said. "We hope the cameras will cut down on the crime."

The City Council's Public Safety and Neighborhood Services Committee heard the crime-fighting plan yesterday.

The cameras will be in use by June 1 on two light poles in the park, between Wightman Avenue and Landis Street. They will be controlled and monitored by police at the nearby Mid-City Division station, Capt. Bob Kanaski said.

He said policies and procedures are in place to address community concerns over privacy issues. Officers who use the cameras will attend classes that will explain those issues, he said. The program will be monitored by the City Attorney's Office and police.

"We will conduct a community public awareness campaign to explain how the cameras will be used," Kanaski said. "Eventually, we hope to use the cameras in other areas of the city."

A report on the pilot project will be presented to the council committee at the end of the summer.

Kanaski said street robberies, assaults, graffiti and gang activity are a constant concern for people using the park. Radio calls and other priorities do not allow officers to fully patrol the area, he said.

He said police will evaluate effectiveness of the cameras to see if the cameras could be used along El Cajon Boulevard, University Avenue, the Gaslamp and Pacific Beach.
Other police agencies in the county and nationwide have used similar mobile cameras to prevent or solve crimes in problem areas. They are used at trolley stations, on freeways, at four county courthouses, the county’s main jails, parks around the county and at selected public gatherings.

The cities of Vista, National City and Chula Vista either are installing or have installed cameras in areas where crime is a concern.

After surveillance cameras were installed by the Los Angeles Police Department at MacArthur Park, there was a reduction in homicides from 160 to 27 in the first year, according to a San Diego Police report. Violent crime was down by 63 percent.

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