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# Iowa City's drone ban may be first of its kind in the U.S.

## Council reluctantly supports ban on drones, traffic cameras

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Written by Adam B Sullivan  
Iowa City Press-Citizen

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Iowa City will be among the first municipalities in the country to adopt a ban on drones and other surveillance devices, but city leaders are making clear that they hope the ordinance isn't permanent.

The Iowa City Council on Tuesday unanimously approved the first reading of an ordinance to ban drones, automated traffic cameras and license-plate readers. That comes after thousands of local residents signed a petition calling for such a ban.

All seven council members supported the ordinance Tuesday night and indicated they'll do the same June 18 when the measure comes up for final approval in two weeks. However, council members said they still want to install some of those devices, red-light cameras in particular. They said they'll wait until state policymakers finish reviewing possible restrictions on cameras.

Because the ordinance comes by way of public petition, city rules require the ordinance to be kept in place for two years, city clerk Marian Karr said. After that, the council is free to repeal it and move forward with surveillance technology.

"I'm going to have to support it — 'have to' is the key word there — because our state has chosen not to move forward with the technology. ... I'll be the first one to bring back red-light cameras as soon as we can," council member Terry Dickens said.

A growing number of municipalities in Iowa have begun using cameras to bust speeders and other traffic violators. Supporters say it boosts traffic safety and provides extra revenue for

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municipalities. Opponents, however, say it constitutes an invasion of privacy and a slippery slope toward more surveillance.

The Iowa Department of Transportation is delaying new cameras on state roadways while officials study possible restrictions. Some state lawmakers have unsuccessfully pushed to ban the devices outright.

One constituent spoke against the camera ban at Tuesday night's meeting.

"You could get millions of dollars just by enforcing the traffic laws on our streets — it costs you nothing. There are companies that will come in and do it for you," said Jim Walters, who yelled during his time at the podium and interrupted the meeting after he took his seat.

Drones, meanwhile, have earned growing notoriety in light of the federal government's drone strikes overseas, but military-style unmanned aircraft aren't known to be in use in Iowa. That could change eventually as state and local governments elsewhere have started to use unmanned aircraft for domestic operations such as monitoring weather or, in a few cases, helping to locate suspects.

A small group of Iowa Republican legislators this year pushed for a statewide ban on weaponized drones and restrictions for peaceful drones, but that bill failed to gain wide support and Democrat leaders opted not to move the bill forward.

Ben Stone, executive director of the American Civil Liberties Union of Iowa, which has worked with Iowa City organizers on the ban, said he doesn't know of any other municipalities with drone bans. Iowa City's drone ban will be among the first in the nation, he said.

"There are a lot of laws and ordinances against traffic cameras, but in terms of drones, it's just so early in the proliferation of that technology," Stone said.

Aleksey Gurtovoy and Martha Hampel — the two organizers who led the petition drive for the ban — were at Tuesday night's City Council meeting. They said afterward that they weren't surprised by the council's plans to move forward with cameras at a later time.

They said the council's decision to adopt the proposed ban was a political one.

"We had no illusions as far as their intentions," Gurtovoy said. "It's definitely in the city's interest do this, especially with three of them up for re-election this year."



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Reach Adam B Sullivan at [asullivan@press-citizen.com](mailto:asullivan@press-citizen.com) or 887-5412.

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