

Tim Clemans at the Washington Coalition for Open Government March 14, 2015 Statewide Conference

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The most interesting session, in my view, was the “Police Use of Body Cams vs. Privacy Rights”. The panel consisted of a new Seattle Police Department (SPD) manager, two legal types, and Tim Clemans who gained recent fame with his request for all of the SPD police video. The manager talked about changes in the SPD, the costs of redacting videos for privacy concerns and how they came up with the Hackathon on automatically processing videos.

The two legal types talked about privacy rights, using terms like “lockbox” (where unedited videos were kept until needed) and “accountability” and retention/release schedules for police video and current proposed legislation concerning police video.

After the two legal types finished, Clemans made a Power Point presentation, showing examples of police videos, discussing the interesting things he found on them, such as someone’s social security number. He then talked about methods of automatically redacting sensitive information, and then presented the idea of releasing all videos in short order with everything blurred and the audio deleted. The blurred videos could then be uploaded to YouTube with date stamps and perhaps a recap of the day’s events.

This would allow someone interested in a particular event to view the videos and locate a section of interest. The person could then request the time interval they desired. The SPD would then have a small video to review and redact, saving time and money. Open Records Attorney William Crittenden asked what it cost to put videos on YouTube and Tim responded that it was free. (I’m not sure if that

would continue if all police departments loaded all their blurred video there, but perhaps Google would just put “Better Call Saul” ads there.)

Tim then discussed limits to the process and how existing software might work.

During question time, one attendee asked one legal type how the “lockbox” would work for a specific situation. There was an extended answer, which in my mind it sounded a whole lot like “I don’t know”. Another attendee asked about a different specific situation, and again the same result. The proposed sequences offered for how and when to access the “lockbox” were a series of processes requiring lots of search and analysis costs, paid for by local taxpayers, not the requestor.

The arguments against releasing police videos concerned personal privacy. However, Open Records Attorney Michelle Earl-Hubbard noted that when you are outside in public, you are already exposed to lots of cameras, so what’s the big deal over police videos. Expanding on her comment about running naked down the street, you are likely to end up on YouTube anyway, with more detail than the police video would provide. She noted that inside someone’s home might need a different approach.

Of the four presenters, only one was very knowledgeable about the problem, its current implementation in the field, proven methods of creating a solution that made accessing information easy, reducing costs to process and the limits of the technical implementation. Guess who. What is scary is that the other presenters typically spend time being experts on legislation.

The moderator, Karen Peterson of The News Tribune, said she had heard Clemans referred to as a “public records terrorist”. She ~~strongly supported~~ found his efforts interesting.

There is a lot of potential good in having police videos, from both sides of the camera. Tim has provided a solution path that is **Better, Faster, and Cheaper** than other suggested approaches.

An example of the unaltered video of the 2015 MLK Day Seattle protest can be found at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tNQiNDjkbM>

The same video, blurred and with audio removed can be found at:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P_zlVHh1fck.

The level of blurring is still being evaluated.

An example of a heavier redaction can be found at:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KJllco9QlWY&list=PL200iEXKb_LXb7-J4LSkfB5aGVacEtD_w&index=8

A comprehensive article can be found at:

Karen Peterson article at The News Tribune (Tacoma)
http://www.thenewstribune.com/2015/02/22/3650852_karen-peterson-records-requester.html?rh=1

The full conference Program Schedule follows.

Statewide Open Government Conference

"Let the Sunshine In"

WCOG advocates for the people's right to access government information



Program Schedule

9:35 AM - 10:30 AM

Welcome and Introductions
Toby Nixon, WCOG President

Keynote Address: John Paff, Hero of the 50 States from New Jersey

10:35 AM - 11:50 AM
(choose one)

Student Journalists Who Use PRA
Moderator: Brian Schraum, Green River College
Guest Speakers: Anna Goebel, Student
Shelby Rowe, Student
Libby Keller, Student

Recent Key Award Winners Discuss Their Use of PRA
Moderator: Brian Sonntag, WCOG Advisory Council
Guest Speakers: Arthur West, Key Award Winner
Roger Harnack, Omak Chronicle
Drew Hendricks, Key Award Winner
Alan Gottlieb, 2nd Amendment Foundation

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11:55 AM - 1:10 PM

General Session
Public Officials Use of Personal Communication Devices
Moderator: Kathy George, Harrison-Benis, LLP
Guest Speakers: Althea Paulson, Bainbridge Island Activist
Jim Doherty, Municipal Research and Services Center
Michele Earl-Hubbard, Allied Law Group
Craig Ritchie, Sequim City Attorney

1:15 PM - 2:00 PM

Lunch

2:05 PM - 3:20 PM

General Session
Police Use of Body Cams vs. Privacy Rights
Moderator: Karen Peterson, The News Tribune
Guest Speakers: Timothy A Clemans, aka "The Anonymous Requester"
Eric Stahl, Davis Wright Tremaine
Jared Friend, American Civil Liberties Union
Mike Wagers, COO of the Seattle Police Department

3:25 PM - 4:00 PM

Closing Remarks and Key Award Presentations
Toby Nixon, WCOG President