

# ETHICS IN TECH PRACTICE:

## Case Study: Surveillance, Safety and Smart Cities

MARKKULA CENTER FOR APPLIED ETHICS

*at Santa Clara University*



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## SURVEILLANCE, SAFETY AND SMART CITIES: AN ETHICS CASE STUDY

by Irina Raicu

Inspired by [Los Angeles' efforts](#), another California city has installed internet-connected light poles in an effort to reduce electricity use and help the environment. The poles are also equipped with microphones that [record gunshot sounds as part of a policing effort](#) (technology called ShotSpotter tries to guide law enforcement agencies and to help them deploy their officers more effectively). The city has also asked private homeowners who install security cameras to sign on to a registry, so that police would be able to contact them quickly and request video footage for investigations in which that footage might provide evidence. It is an effort [similar to one in San Jose](#), and, as in San Jose, the sign-up for the registry is voluntary. The city's police department also uses automated license plate readers.

The city is now seeking a product that would allow them to bring together the data collected by the sensors and microphones on the light poles and the data collected by the automated license plate readers, in order to have the resulting information ready to be used in combination with video collected from private security cameras in the course of law enforcement investigations.

Should your company/team contract with the city to create such a product?

### Discussion Questions:

1. Who are the stakeholders involved? Who should be consulted about such a project's goals and development?
2. What additional facts might be required? What practical steps might you need to take in order to access the information/perspectives needed to manage the ethical landscape of this project?
3. What are some other ethical issues that any designers/developers of such a product would need to address?
4. How might this project be evaluated through the various ethical 'lenses' described in the "Conceptual Frameworks" document?
5. In this project, what moral values are potentially conflicting with each other? Is there any way to reconcile them? Even if conflict is unavoidable, are there ways to respect all relevant interests/values? How?
6. As a project team, how might you go about sorting through these ethical issues and addressing them? Which of the ethical issues you have identified would you prioritize, and why?
7. Who would be the appropriate persons on a team to take those steps? At what level, and by what methods, should decisions be made within the company about how to manage the ethical issues raised by this project?