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Officials divided on whether devices will reduce park vandalism

A series of recent park vandalism incidents has spurred Village of Fredonia officials to consider the use of security cameras.

However, a recent meeting of the village's Public Safety Committee showed that opinions were divided over whether the devices might intrude on the privacy of residents.

The problem surfaced after Stoney Creek Park was repeatedly targeted by vandals. Other parks have also been hit in the past.

Without a full-time police department to patrol the park areas, Village President Chuck Lapicola suggested installing a wireless camera system at the park that would be motion activated.

A wireless system would also allow surveillance of vital village facilities, such as the treatment plant and police station, which Lapicola said have been identified as possible terrorist targets by the Department of Homeland Security.

"By using portable cameras, for $1,000 we could provide coverage all over the village," Lapicola said.

The cameras he suggested have high-definition lenses and hard drives capable of recording weeks of images.

"Even if the cameras aren't turned on, putting up signs saying the community is covered might get people to think twice about doing something wrong," Lapicola said.

"It seems every time we get a park fixed up, it is often no more than a month later when someone comes in and vandalizes things."

Trustee Jill Bertram was more worried about the impression people might get if cameras are put up in public places such as parks.

"I don't have a problem putting cameras at the water plant, but I don't believe in having them in public places where we can watch everyone. It is intruding on people's privacy in our parks," Bertram said.

"The vandalism — we've seen it all before. Kids will do stupid things."

Besides, she said, the cameras would only provide images after the fact, because the village does not have the manpower to have a police officer monitor the cameras around the clock.

"We would definitely be able to assist the police in deterring crime," Lapicola said.

Trustee Fritz Buchholtz, chairman of the committee, said the privacy issue has blurred greatly

because of the wide use of camera phones.

“You never know when someone is taking your picture with their phone. They are everywhere,” Buchholtz said.

He said he doesn’t think the village should be inserting itself in the role of law enforcement.

“I don’t want to become the police department,” Buchholtz said.

Without a full committee at the meeting, a recommendation to the Village Board was deferred until a future meeting.