

Chico bike path cameras go live; advocate envisions surveillance at city parks, plaza

Advocate envisions surveillance systems at city parks, plaza

By Andre Byik, Chico Enterprise-Record

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Chico >> A police surveillance system installed along a troubled bicycle path near Chico State University has officially gone live, and a driving force behind the project envisions security cameras watching over other public spaces.

During a press event Monday at the bike path that runs adjacent to Nord Avenue, Katie Simmons, CEO of the Chico Chamber of Commerce, said she hoped the roughly \$20,000 surveillance system — which police have said has been completely funded by donations — would be used as a pilot project that could be expanded throughout the city.

“I think that while this is a celebration of a culmination of something very, very spectacular, I also see it as the start of something that I hope we continue to invest in as the years go by,” Simmons said to a crowd of City Council members, city and university officials, law enforcement leaders and community members. “I would love to see surveillance at Children’s (Playground) — that is another area that we have lost our community stake in — City Plaza, One-Mile, Caper Acres. All of these really special spaces in our community that are shared by students and residents.”

Chico police Lt. Matt Madden said the surveillance system, which comprises three self-contained “pods” placed along the bike path between Big Chico Creek and West Sacramento Avenue, has the capability to expand should the city approve additional surveillance projects.

“One of the reasons we went with this pod-style camera was the idea that if we get to expand this project, we just get another camera,” Madden said, adding, “So if the city decided to put one in the plaza ... it would still use the same software that we have.”

The Chico police surveillance system unveiled Monday — also known as the Bike Path Safety Camera Project — is intended to improve safety for the many students and other community members who use the path. In February, the Police Department said it had received about 193 calls for service there since January 2013. The calls included reports of such violent crimes as sexual assaults, stabbings and robberies.

The camera system — which has received funding through individuals, businesses, organizations, foundations and Chico State — has the ability to stream live video and record video, as well.

Madden said officers can use the system for live monitoring when a crime is reported in the area of the bike path. The system’s most significant purpose, however, will be to serve as a deterrent.

“The cameras will deter crime. It’s provable,” the lieutenant said, adding that the cameras are not designed to be monitored 24/7. “They’re designed to be a deterrent.”

Among those who attended Monday’s event were the parents of Kristina Chesterman, a Chico State student who was fatally struck by a drunken driver as she was bicycling on Nord Avenue the night of Sept. 22, 2013.

“As a mom I have no doubt that other parents are going to feel like we do now,” Sandra Chesterman said. “We feel that Chico is safer. And I know that had Kristina felt safe in this area, this is where she would have been that night on her bike. She wouldn’t have been riding along Nord Avenue where it wasn’t safe for her. So thank you, as a mom, for this project.”

Dave Chesterman said while his family was not aware of the bike path project, the Chestermans would support similar projects in the future. It’s what Kristina Chesterman would want, he said.

“She would be very proud,” Dave Chesterman said. “She was very civic minded, very proud of Chico.”

Chico Police Chief Mike O’Brien said the importance of the bike path surveillance system is embodied by the Chestermans’ story, noting that Kristina Chesterman likely would have used the path if she had considered it safe.

“For me as chief,” O’Brien said, “anytime we have a public space that is not being utilized by the full, entire public, I find that unacceptable.”

Speakers on Monday also included Mayor Mark Sorensen, Vice Mayor Sean Morgan, Chico State President Gayle Hutchinson and University Police Chief John Feeney.

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