

Lights, camera, policy

Billings County to confirm video recording policy for government buildings

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In the ever-growing technological world people live in, cameras, surveillance systems, and computers still require policy decisions to determine how they are used by government officials in the buildings where they work. With that in mind—and after some acrimonious responses from city workers regarding digital cameras in Billings County offices and facilities—the commission will soon decide how to address the placement of cameras, the handling of their data, and their overall use.

It was determined that some of the cameras in question were installed without the commission's approval, and the first step was to halt the surveillance in order to establish a policy. A final decision will be made after State's Attorney Jared Geitzen investigates the matter, reviews policies in other jurisdictions, and presents his findings at the commission's regular May 5 meeting. While North Dakota does not have a specific set of statutes requiring data storage—which was one of the questions raised as it pertains to "sunshine laws" in the event such

information is needed in a legal proceeding—Billings County must determine what its own system can support.

Most data are deleted as they are overwritten over time, and storage is limited by hard drive capacity—as with all computer systems—so that limitation must be assessed first. In addition, the placement of certain cameras will be reviewed, and only those specifically approved will be used in the future. For example, a camera in the courthouse was initially installed around 2021, while others had been placed earlier; however,



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until a policy is finalized, all will remain in limited use or not in use at all.

Questions were also raised about whether

the county's vehicles are equipped with GPS trackers. At present, only safety vehicles and ambulances use such devices. Other vehicles, such as those used by road crews, were tracked in the past, but that practice has apparently been discontinued.

Another challenge involves open-records requests. Limitations may need to be established regarding how long data are stored and where they are kept, while still allowing for access when required under open-records laws. Commissioners generally agreed on the use of cameras in certain instances—for safety purposes and crime prevention, for example—so future discussions will focus on locations and the types of cameras to be used.

The state's attorney also said he will review North Dakota code regarding open-records laws before making his presentation. In the meantime, police vehicles will continue to use cameras, with data typically retained for about 60 days, as such footage is necessary for documenting traffic stops and other incidents. Whatever policy is ultimately adopted, signage

will likely be posted to inform the public that surveillance is in use in various facilities.

In the case of EMS vehicles and road crews, it was noted that some "trust had been broken," which has impacted morale. Additionally, some Ring cameras had been installed in other buildings, but it was unclear who installed them or who was paying for their services. Their use was immediately discontinued as the commission works to determine their origin.

Also yet to be decided is how best to protect county property. While it is understandable that cameras may be installed to guard against theft and other misconduct, those decisions will be made alongside other elements of the policy in the near future. Cameras may also be necessary in the event of criminal proceedings; however, in areas where privacy is expected—such as bathrooms, locker rooms, or dressing rooms—they would be strictly prohibited.



For more information about the Billings County Commission, continue reading the Billings County Pioneer or visit www.billingscountynd.gov.

NOTICE OF ABSENTEE/MAIL BALLOT APPLICATION

Applications for absentee/mail ballots were mailed from the office of the County Auditor on April 22, 2026. Individuals not receiving an application may obtain one from the office of the County Auditor or at the following website: vote.nd.gov.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand at Medora, North Dakota, this 23rd day of April, 2026.

Marcia Kessel
Billings County Auditor/Treasurer

 ABSENTEE/MAIL BALLOT APPLICATION SECRETARY OF STATE SFN 51468 (10-2023)		For Office Use Only Precinct Part _____	
For reference, see North Dakota Century Code, Chapter 16.1-07.			
Application must be for at least one of the following elections: (check all that apply)			
<input type="checkbox"/> June (Primary) election	<input type="checkbox"/> City or city special election	<input type="checkbox"/> State or county special election	
<input type="checkbox"/> November (General) election	<input type="checkbox"/> School or school special election		
Applicant Information: (ALL FIELDS REQUIRED)			
Voter's name		Date of birth	Daytime telephone number
North Dakota ID type used: (check one)			
<input type="checkbox"/> Driver's license	<input type="checkbox"/> Non-driver's ID	<input type="checkbox"/> Long-term care certificate (include with application)	<input type="checkbox"/> Tribal ID
<input type="checkbox"/> Passport (only for voters living outside the United States) or military ID**		<input type="checkbox"/> Applicant without ID*	
ID number (required only if driver's license, non-driver's ID, tribal ID, passport, or military ID is selected above)			
Residential address		City	State ZIP code
Ballot delivery address (if different from residential address)		City	State ZIP code
I do solemnly affirm that I have resided or will reside in the precinct where my residential voting address is located for at least 30 days next preceding the election and will be a qualified elector of the precinct.			
Signature (required)			Date
Applicant Unable to Sign:			
If the applicant is unable to sign the applicant's name, the applicant shall mark <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> or use the applicant's signature stamp on the application in the presence of a disinterested individual. The disinterested individual shall print the name of the individual marking the "X" or using the signature stamp below the "X" or signature and shall sign the disinterested individual's own name following the printed name together with the notation, "witness to the mark."			
		Printed name of person making mark or voter's signature stamp	
		Signature of "witness to the mark"	
*Applicant Without ID:			
If the applicant does not possess or cannot secure an approved form of identification due to a disability with which the individual lives and which prevents the individual from traveling to obtain, another qualified elector of the state may attest that the applicant is a qualified elector of that precinct by signing below and providing his or her approved North Dakota identification number. NOTE: A qualified elector may not attest the qualifications of more than four applications in an election.			
Printed name of attester		Driver's / non-driver's / tribal ID number	
Signature of attester		Date	Daytime telephone number
**Active Military and Overseas Voter:			
Check ONE (if applicable):			
<input type="checkbox"/> Citizen living outside of the United States			
<input type="checkbox"/> Uniformed service or family member living away from the voter's residence, yet within the United States			
<input type="checkbox"/> Uniformed service or family member living away from the voter's residence, yet outside the United States			
If one of the check boxes above applies to you, please indicate your preferred ballot delivery method:			
<input type="checkbox"/> Mail <input type="checkbox"/> Email (provide email address): _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Fax (provide fax number): _____			
Mail or submit to the auditor of your county of residence or appropriate election officer (The signature on this affidavit will be compared to the signature on the envelope in which the absentee ballot must be placed.)			

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