CITY of OAKLAND



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An Open Letter to the Oakland community and the City Council

Dear friends, colleagues, fellow Oaklanders,

As a city with limited resources and a long track record of innovation -- and a city that's faced its share of natural disasters -- Oakland is always looking for thoughtful, effective new ways to keep people safe.

When major emergencies strike, first responders are racing the clock and need to quickly understand the scope of the event. The Domain Awareness Center is a joint project between the City and the Port of Oakland to provide first responders with real-time information and a common operating picture during emergencies. It will consolidate and make sense of data and video feeds from cameras that already exist, and which in most cases have been active for some time.

Any firefighter, police officer or emergency medic will tell you that in a crisis, information comes from many sources, and making sense of them quickly will save time and save lives. The better we can gather and analyze that information, the better we can make smart decisions about deploying our resources, informing the public for their safety, and minimizing environmental damage.

Two decades ago, Oakland experienced two crises in two years. The 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake and the 1991 firestorm showed us how vulnerable we can be to natural disasters, and the life and death importance of information.

During the firestorm, one brave police officer tried to lead hill residents away from the fire to safety. But as they fled downhill on Charing Cross Road, the officer and ten residents became stuck where the road had narrowed and become impassable with abandoned cars. All eleven people perished. However, they might have survived if the officer had better, quicker, broader access to information about the safest routes out. This tragic toll is just one example that underscores the urgency of our work to prepare and organize our resources to more effectively respond when another disaster strikes.

As we've gone through our public process over the last several weeks, many of our residents and other Oakland stakeholders have let us know they have serious concerns about how the Center could affect their rights to privacy. Let's be very clear: preserving public safety *also* means safeguarding those rights.

As stewards of the public's interests, we know the government doesn't get to simply say "trust us" and carry on: we have to earn that trust on a daily basis. We have to be accountable and transparent, and the public must to be able to access the mechanisms that ensure we stay that way.

So to carry this project forward and increase public safety, while ensuring that the public's rights to privacy are strongly protected, I have proposed two changes.

First, we are creating an advisory committee to develop policies that will address information access and privacy rights while ensuring the Center's operational effectiveness for emergency response. The committee will include privacy rights experts, key public advocacy groups, and first responder agency representatives. I look forward to naming the members of that committee soon.

Second, to ensure a thorough and satisfactory process building those safeguards, I ask that we move forward with the project on Port of Oakland property only. We will hold off on the aspects of the project that would include cameras on city streets. We will return to those elements separately, and only when the advisory committee is satisfied that the safeguards we've built together with the community are sturdy and enforceable. Any new camera systems, or any other additions to the Center, would have to be proposed separately and go to our City Council in a public process.

I look forward to moving forward in close partnership with my colleagues and the Oakland community. By working together, we can continue to make our city safer for everyone.

Sincerely,

Oakland Mayor Jean Quan