

DETROIT

Detroit may replace its controversial ShotSpotter technology



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The Detroit Police Department is seeking bids for gunshot detection technology, which could lead to the department replacing its controversial ShotSpotter program.

During a Detroit City Council committee meeting on Monday, Police Chief Todd Bettison said his department requested a 9-month, \$2.06 million extension to the current ShotSpotter contract so police leadership will have time to review proposals from multiple vendors. The city's current \$7 million contract expires at the end of June.

“When we started, ShotSpotter was the only technology available, but now there are other options,” Bettison told the council’s Public Health and Safety Committee on Monday. ShotSpotter is a product operated by California-based SoundThinking, Inc.

Bettison said in seeking bids, he isn't "stuck on a vendor or company."

"We're past that. I'm all in support of the gun[shot] detection technology, so if you hear me start to not even refer to it as ShotSpotter...it's about the technology that we need in our city," he said.

John Fisher, a spokesperson for SoundThinking, the company that operates the ShotSpotter system, wrote in an email, "SoundThinking is proud to have

successfully served DPD and the citizens of Detroit with gunshot detection services since 2021. We are actively participating in the current RFP evaluation and look forward to the process and prospect of continuing to serve the city.”

Other vendors offering similar gunshot detection technology include Flock Safety, which also provides license-plate readers to cities across Michigan.

Detroit’s relationship with ShotSpotter dates back to 2020, when the council approved a four-year contract worth \$1.5 million. The debate over a \$7 million contract renewal in late 2022 was hotly contested and the renewal passed by a slim margin, with a 5-4 City Council vote.

Detroit Mayor Mary Sheffield, who was the council president before being elected mayor, voted against renewing the contract, which expires at the end of June.

Detroit Councilwoman Gabriela Santiago-Romero and Councilman Denzel McCampbell expressed skepticism at extending ShotSpotter contract. Santiago-Romero also voted against the 2022 contract renewal.

“I still don’t believe it’s worth the money that we’re spending,” Santiago-Romero told The News in an interview last week.

“DPD will say that it’s worth saving a life or solving a case, but while I agree that’s valuable and important, but I’m more interested in putting that money into something that’s preventative,” she said, citing increased funding for Community Violence Intervention (CVI) programs as a priority.

The Detroit Police Department declined to comment on the request for proposals.

Bettison and other police leaders say the gunshot detection system is an essential investigative tool, allowing police to respond quickly to shooting incidents, whether or not someone calls 911. At Mondya's meeting, Bettison and Bliss said ShotSpotter had led to 250 search warrants, 278 guns seized and 78 arrests in 2025.

According to the DPD presentation, 60 out of 135 firearm homicides in the ShotSpotter coverage area resulted in a ShotSpotter alert last year, and the department had closed 26 out of 60 cases, a rate of 43.3%.

“It’s a tool in the toolbox that helps us solve crime,” Bliss said.

Santiago-Romero said while she appreciated the data Bettison submitted during the committee meeting, “I still have questions about the effectiveness of ShotSpotter and would like to know more about data storage and access.”

McC Campbell also raised concerns about the approach of using surveillance technology to reduce crime.

“I’m very skeptical about surveillance technology, especially around civil liberties and privacy,” he told Bettison and Deputy Chief Mark Bliss during the committee meeting on Monday. McC Campbell also told The Detroit News he prefers increased funding for CVI efforts.

In 2022, a group of Detroiters and a nonprofit based in the city successfully sued the city for failing to follow a city ordinance that governs proposals for new surveillance technology.

An appeals court ruled in October 2025 that the city did not give community members enough time to evaluate and comment on the expanded ShotSpotter contract in 2022.

The city posted its proposal less than two weeks before the Detroit City Council discussed the contract, which the three-judge panel ruled violated the city ordinance.

In the ruling, Court of Appeals Judges Brock Swartzle and Kristina Robinson Garrett wrote, “To ensure that technology serves the people, and not the other way around, strict compliance with procedural safeguards like the [the ordinance] may well be needed. And, unfortunately, such compliance was lacking here.”

