

**TO:** Mayor and City Council  
**FROM:** Council Member Olgy Diaz and Senior Council Policy Analyst Lynda Foster  
**COPY:** Elizabeth Pauli, City Manager; City Clerk's Office  
**SUBJECT:** Community questions on implementation of ShotSpotter technology in Tacoma  
**DATE:** March 3, 2025

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### Overview:

Many community members have reached out to City Council Members to share their concerns about an \$800,000 grant from the Federal Department of Justice—Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA), that will fund a pilot with ShotSpotter, along with other technologies, to help address gun violence in our City. A ShotSpotter presentation is scheduled at the March 4, 2025, Study Session meeting. While Council does not take testimony or questions from the public at study session meetings, this meeting is an opportunity for Council Members to ask questions about implementation of this technology. On Monday, Feb 24, Council Member Olgy Diaz sent a request out to the Position 7 E-newsletter listserv requesting community's help identifying the most pressing topics of inquiry for the discussion. A broad range of questions and comments were submitted. Below is a summation of the questions broken into 3 categories:

- **ShotSpotter Discussion Questions** – questions to consider asking at the March 4 Study Session discussion on ShotSpotter.
- **Broad Background Questions** – questions for the City Manager and presenters to consider addressing in their presentation Tuesday or in follow up materials resulting from the study session.
- **Questions and Suggested Reflections for Council** – questions for council members to consider in further policy setting related to ShotSpotter technology and possible implementation.

### ShotSpotter Discussion Questions:

- Questions about effectiveness
  - What is the evidence that ShotSpotter is effective in crime reduction?
  - Why have cities with higher crime rates like Chicago and Atlanta ended their contract with ShotSpotter?
  - Has there been rigorous randomized control studies about the efficacy of ShotSpotter to reduce crime, particularly gun violence?
- Questions about data use and integrity
  - What specific data will TPD collect to measure ShotSpotter's effectiveness?
  - Will this data be available for public review?
  - Will there be data analysis that includes reviewing racial and demographic impacts?
  - How will the City track "false positives" and how will this data be reported to the City Council and the public?
  - What safeguards will be in place to prevent ShotSpotter data from being manipulated or misused by police officers?
  - What is the reliability of the data created to be used as evidence in court cases?

- Questions about logistics of implementation
  - How does ShotSpotter work as far as technology and implementation into our response system?
  - Are there other programs or technologies that the grant money could be spent on besides ShotSpotter?
  - How will ShotSpotter data interact with requirements of the state Public Records Act?
  - How will Tacoma track and publicly report data on police stops, arrests, and racial demographics linked to ShotSpotter alerts?
  - What is the total cost of implementing ShotSpotter, including installation, maintenance, and officer response time?
  - Does Tacoma have legal liability if a resident is falsely arrested or harmed due to a ShotSpotter alert? Is there funding needed or already set aside for added legal liability for potential wrongful arrests?
  - What steps will be taken if the data shows that ShotSpotter does not meaningfully reduce gun violence?
  - What could trigger Tacoma being required to repay the grant, and what safeguards are in place to prevent this from happening?
  - What more can be done to ensure that there is sufficient deliberation between the community, Council, ShotSpotter experts, and TPD before implementation?
  - Is Tacoma Fire Department dispatched when there is a ShotSpotter activation?
- Questions about equity and community impact
  - What special training or protections from unjust profiling will be required of officers responding to ShotSpotter calls?
  - What impacts has ShotSpotter had on residential and commercial insurance rates in treated communities? What impacts are there on property values and overall real estate in treated communities?
  - Will this technology displace gun violence and cause increased violence in other neighborhoods?
  - What civil rights protections are impacted by this technology? What protections can we add before implementation?
  - What has ShotSpotter done to address the concerns of CampaignZero – a prominent Black led national police reform organization?
  - What protections will be in place to prevent ShotSpotter alerts from leading to unnecessary stops, arrests, and increased police presence in historically marginalized communities?
  - Is there a plan for evaluating unintended consequences, including increased police interactions and wrongful arrests in BIPOC communities?
  - How does this investment align with Tacoma's stated commitments to racial equity and public safety reform?
  - Given Tacoma's commitment to fostering a safe and inclusive community, what impact analysis has been conducted to assess how ShotSpotter might affect vulnerable populations, including LGBTQIA2S+ youth and unhoused individuals?
  - What has the transition from having ShotSpotter to removal looked like and how has it impacted community it was serving?

- Questions about surveillance
  - Tacoma has publicly committed to rejecting surveillance tools that disproportionately target marginalized communities. How does the approval of ShotSpotter align with this principle?
  - What safeguards around data and surveillance do we for communities feeling targeted by the federal government within this project/contract?
  - Could this technology inadvertently be feeding data into broader federal surveillance networks?
  - How will the City ensure that ShotSpotter does not increase surveillance and police interactions in ways that disproportionately impact LGBTQIA2S+ individuals, who already experience higher rates of criminalization and police violence?
- Questions about TPD
  - What crime data was submitted to secure the federal funding for this grant? Does the City have a plan in place if federal agencies determine the submitted data was inaccurate?
  - What is TPD's current clearance rate for gun related crime?
  - What research into this technology did TPD do before applying for this grant?
  - Has Tacoma Police Department (TPD) consulted Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department (TPCHD) on an equity analysis to assess ShotSpotter's potential impact on over-policed communities?
  - What alternative, evidence-based public safety solutions were considered before pursuing ShotSpotter?
  - Has the City sought legal guidance from civil rights organizations before proceeding with ShotSpotter implementation?
  - How is Tacoma different in crime trends than cities that have rejected using ShotSpotter like Chicago and Seattle?
- Questions about ShotSpotter business practices
  - Why does ShotSpotter refuse to disclose the exact locations of its sensors, even under subpoena? How does this lack of transparency impact public trust?

#### **Broad Background Questions:**

- Will this help reduce random and wild gunshots across the city?
- Will this technology move around to different locations throughout the city, or will just certain locations receive it?
- How have community members, particularly those in over-policed neighborhoods, been involved in the decision-making and evaluation process?
- Have only historical city affiliated groups been engaged?
- How long was the engagement process?
- Were residents in apartments engaged?
- What is the false positive rate ShotSpotter identification?
- What empirical evidence does the ShotSpotter manufacturer have that demonstrates it prevents/deters gun violence and crime, or improve identification of the perpetrator of a crime?

- Is the discharge of a gun in Tacoma in and of itself a crime?
- Has ShotSpotter been evaluated by an independent reviewing. If so, when? If not, why not?
- How much will this cost after the three-year trial?
- Does accepting this DOJ grant commit Tacoma to future expenses once the grant period ends?

#### **Questions and Suggested Reflections for Council:**

- Are there solutions that could be implemented that would contribute to community safety without potentially profiling or over policing black and brown residents?
- Are there other solutions that Hosmer residents have called for to gun violence that do not involve SoundThinking? How can Council encourage those solutions?
- Why would the city wait to "consult the data" when there is documented independent research from myriad fields of academia and community organizations about how SoundThinking churns out unreliable data and consults with "experts" who skew the data? Why would Council Members expect fair and transparent results from this company?
- How can we build trust with community in this technology?
- Are we willing to walk away from this grant if it erodes belief and trust?
- Why is Tacoma investing \$800,000 in a controversial technology instead of funding community-based violence prevention programs that have been proven to work?
- Will the city fund a fully independent audit of ShotSpotter's impact before renewing or expanding the contract?
- Has Council reviewed the leaked [WIRED](#) report exposing how ShotSpotter locations are secretly concentrated in neighborhood where the majority of residents are people of color?
- How does Tacoma plan to address concerns raised by the Electronic Privacy Information Center (EPIC) that ShotSpotter may violate the Civil Rights Act due to racial disparities in deployment?
- If an independent audit shows racial disparities or increased wrongful police stops linked to ShotSpotter, will Tacoma terminate the program?
- If ShotSpotter is a tool that "can help police-community relations," what evidence suggests that Tacoma Police Department has the trust and culture necessary to use this tool responsibly?
- Why invest in a surveillance-based solution when research supports community-based violence intervention programs as more effective?
- Given the City's strong stance against discrimination and its stated commitment to fostering an inclusive and safe environment, does Tacoma's investment in ShotSpotter reflect its values and legal obligations under Resolutions 41627 and 41628?