

Pleasantville voters approve gunfire detection system ShotSpotter

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PLEASANTVILLE — Police Chief Sean Riggan said he was already talking about how to implement a \$195,000-per-year gunshot-audio detection system an hour after the polls closed Tuesday night.

“We have a ton of friends in the community, which is why we got the support we did,” Riggan said Wednesday.

The unofficial vote showed 1,566, or more than 70 percent, of residents voted yes on a ballot question for the city to spend \$195,000 per year for the next three years to purchase the ShotSpotter system, according to the Atlantic County Clerk’s Office website.

For homeowners, that means an increase of about 2.5 cents on the municipal property-tax rate. Residents with a home assessed at \$100,000 would pay about \$25 more per year.

In 2016, city police received 109 shots-fired calls, Riggan said, and the number has continued to decrease, with 80 in 2017 and 38 so far this year. However, the number of recorded gunshots fired in the city is likely to increase with the system in place, he said, because ShotSpotter will report all of them, even ones residents don’t call in to police.

When a shot is fired, acoustic sensors placed throughout a city will capture the precise time, location and audio snippets of the sound, according to the ShotSpotter website. Within 45 seconds of the gun’s discharge, police will receive a digital alert.

City Council approved the ballot question in July after years of not being picked for federal or other grants to fund it. It will be the eighth municipality in the state with the technology, joining neighboring Atlantic City, which went live with its system in 2013. Pleasantville is the first municipality in the country to put the technology before a referendum, Mayor Jesse Tweedle Sr. said.

“It gives you an idea of what our vision is, how proactive we are, how creative we are,” he said. “I’m very proud of our police department, and I’m very proud of the residents of Pleasantville. It’s indicative of how we work with our residents and the way we work with the community.”

But not everyone in the community is excited about the outcome of the vote.

Randy Millman, who has owned his Main Street store, Randy’s Jewelers, for 23 years, said taxes in the city are already “astronomical.” This is just another thing to add on, he said, adding he’s surprised the vote passed. But he also called the system a good, intelligent idea.

“If it can reduce crime, that’s wonderful,” Millman said, balancing the scales with his hands between cost and safety. “If it saves one person, it’s worth it.”

Once it's up and running, more than 90 percent of the city will be 90 percent covered by the system, Riggin said, adding the location of the sensors will be confidential. But the locations of all of the shooting homicides in the past 10 years will be inside the covered area, he said.

Riggin said he plans to have a timeline to the governing body within 30 days, and the system up and running in 180 days.

"I expect we'll be up and running well before that, but I'm not going to put a deadline on that 12 hours after an election," he said.