MEMORANDUM

TO: City Council
FROM: Jackie Stepp, Interim Chief of Police
DATE: Aug 14, 2026
RE: Update on APD Technology Flock ALPR Program

The Asheville Police Department (APD) values the ongoing dialogue regarding Automated License Plate Reader (ALPR) technology. This memo serves as an update on our use of the Flock system, our commitment to transparency, safeguards and accountability, and our strategic plan for technology consolidation. We recognize the importance of balancing effective investigative tools with the maintenance of public trust and the protection of civil liberties.

Additionally, there was an inquiry regarding the poles supporting some of the ALPRs. Of the 11 APD installations, eight are installed on poles and foundations designed in accordance with the AASHTO LRFD Specifications for Structural Supports for Highway Signs, Luminaires, and Traffic Signals. This is the standard generally used as the basis for NCDOT sign-support requirements, including breakaway design, and is also the standard followed by the City of Asheville. The AASHTO standard is specifically referenced on the pole detail sheet included in the installation plans.
The remaining three installations are mounted on existing wood utility poles. These poles are subject to different structural requirements and are not governed by the AASHTO design standards referenced above.

Program Overview and Current Status
APD currently uses ALPR technology as an investigative tool. Since April 2024, marked police vehicles have been equipped with Axon Mobile ALPR technology. In February 2025, APD added the Flock ALPR system.

There are currently 86 Flock cameras deployed throughout Buncombe County, including 11 owned by the City of Asheville.

Below are a few examples of how ALPR technology helps our investigators identify vehicles connected to serious crimes and develop leads that would otherwise be unavailable.

- Most recent double homicide: Flock provided critical investigative information that helped APD identify vehicles and individuals connected to the homicide, including co-conspirators.
- July 5 Maple Crest shooting: Flock helped investigators identify all vehicles involved in the drive-by shooting. As a result of the investigation, two individuals have been charged to date.
- Grove Arcade jewelry store robbery: Two offenders from Georgia were involved in a crime spree across the Southeast, including the theft of more than $3,000 in jewelry from a store in the Grove Arcade. Flock provided critical information that helped investigators identify and locate the offenders, who were subsequently arrested.
- Hit and Run: On August 13th, 2026, a hit-and-run occurred. Within 39 minutes of our civilian public safety analyst receiving the request to locate the vehicle, the vehicle was located, and the owner was identified.
- The APD has received hundreds of stolen vehicles since the implementation of Flock ALPRs.This occurs almost daily.

It is also important to understand that discontinuing APD's Flock contract would not eliminate ALPR technology from our region. It would eliminate APD's access to an investigative resource (Flock ALPRs) already deployed throughout Buncombe County. That would mean fewer investigative tools available to officers and potentially more time spent developing alternative leads in cases where Flock currently provides that critical information. This is particularly important given that APD has not yet reached full staffing levels and must maximize the tools available to our personnel.

Our goal is not to choose between public safety and public trust. We can use technology to solve crime while maintaining strong safeguards, strict oversight, and privacy protections.

Safeguards and Accountability
APD has operated its ALPR program under defined access restrictions and privacy safeguards since its inception.

- **Restricted Access:** Access is limited to vetted, trained personnel with a documented law enforcement purpose.

- **Automated Auditing:** Every search logs the user, timestamp, and specific investigative justification.
- **Public Metrics:** Program data is published on our public Flock Transparency Page.

Additional safeguards implemented in August 2026
Following the Asheville City Council's civil liberties resolution adopted in June 2026, we have taken additional steps to strengthen those protections.

- **Restricted Access:** Reduced the number of personnel authorized to conduct searches by 33% (from 18 to 12),
- **Audit Oversight:** The Professional Standards personnel are now required to be physically present during all compliance audits.
- **Restricted Outside Searches:** APD reduced the number of law enforcement agencies with access to our system. Access is now limited to surrounding states (Tennessee, South Carolina, Virginia, and Georgia) rather than the previous 500-mile radius.
- **Retention Period:** Reduced the vehicle search timeframe from 30 days to 21 days. Information beyond 21 days is automatically purged.
- **Independent policy review:** We are also beginning conversations with a civil liberties expert to independently review our technology-related policies and identify additional opportunities to strengthen our safeguards.

Strategic Path Forward and Transition Timeline
APD is not pursuing a full transition away from Flock. Instead, we are working to right-size our Flock deployment while expanding and integrating Axon's ALPR capabilities based on our operational needs.

This approach allows APD to maintain access to the broader regional Flock network while using Axon technology where it provides specific operational and integration benefits.

Timeline:
ALPR: By February 2027, APD expects to complete the planned reduction of its Flock contract and have the Axon ALPR infrastructure operational. APD is currently exploring transitioning from its existing Flock camera deployment to a Flock software license that would preserve access to the Flock network without maintaining the same level of APD-owned Flock infrastructure. This approach is particularly relevant as APD evaluates consolidating the BCSO RTIC into the APD RTIC, since BCSO currently uses Flock ALPR cameras. If a software-only option is not available or does not meet APD’s operational

needs, APD will evaluate whether to continue its Flock relationship beyond February 2027. The final structure of the Flock relationship remains under evaluation.

Transparency and Community Engagement
The APD recognizes that the use of ALPR technology raises legitimate questions about privacy, civil liberties, and government surveillance. Those concerns deserve clear answers and ongoing oversight.

APD has launched a public-facing Technology and Public Safety project page that includes program information, FAQs, and a timeline. We will continue to make ALPR information and program metrics publicly available through our transparency resources.

Our responsibility is to use technology when it provides a legitimate public-safety benefit while ensuring that its use remains lawful, limited, accountable, and consistent with the civil-liberties protections established by the City Council. Public safety and public trust are not competing priorities. APD is committed to protecting both.

Please let me know if you have additional questions and I will work with the City Manager's Office to provide additional information and/or clarification.