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Belmont gives Redflex the boot

June 13, 2013, 05:00 AM By [Bill Silverfarb](#) Daily Journal

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Redflex was given the boot by the Belmont City Council in a passionate Tuesday night meeting, ending a three-year relationship with the red light camera operator for traffic enforcement at busy Ralston Avenue, El Camino Real and Old County Road.

The vote was 3-1, with Councilman David Braunstein voting to extend a contract with Redflex by two years. Mayor Christine Wozniak, Councilwoman Coralin Feierbach and Councilman Dave Warden voted to not renew the contract with Vice Mayor Warren Lieberman being absent.

Before the vote was cast, a Redflex executive, Jim Saunders, told the council a recent bribery and corruption scandal was behind the company and even offered the city a 20 percent discount to continue the traffic enforcement program an additional two years.

A long line of residents and a woman who called herself Jane Q. Public from San Francisco, who recently got an unexpected red light camera ticket from Belmont in the mail, each urged the council to end the program for a variety of reasons, however.

Jane Q. Public's impassioned three-minute plea during a public hearing solicited a rousing response from Warden, who has opposed the program for years.

Jane Q. Public said she would never spend a dime in Belmont again after receiving a \$540 ticket from the city for not making a complete stop before making a right-hand turn. She got the ticket about two months after the violation and told the council it would be impossible to fight.

She also blasted the city for outsourcing police work to Arizona and said the money she is being fined could have gone toward eating lunch or buying goods in Belmont.

Warden then essentially apologized to the woman, offered to buy her lunch and shared his own story about getting one of the red light camera tickets in the East Bay.

"I got a red light [ticket] in Newark years ago and haven't spent a dime there since," said Warden, who works for a company in Fremont. Since he got the ticket in the mail months after the alleged infraction, Warden said their was no "cause and effect" in receiving the ticket and that he ended up "mad at the city."

Accident rates have not gone down, Warden said, and the money from the fine goes to the state, county and "you guys," Warden said as he pointed toward the Redflex officials sitting in the audience.

"I hate these things," Warden said.

Feierbach said she was ready to vote against extending the contract last month and Wozniak said Redflex was not the kind of company she wanted to do business with considering recent bribery charges in Chicago and a slew of company resignations during the corruption investigation.

Resident Wade Leshon told the council that up to \$1 million a year in discretionary funding leaves the city through the program.

"They are not a welcoming thing for people who come into Belmont," Leshon said about the cameras.

Bryan Coker got one of the tickets in the mail and was expecting it to be \$100 or \$200.

"It's an immoral way for the city to generate money," he said about the \$500-plus red light ticket he got in the mail.

Resident Perry Kennan said the money generated from the tickets should be staying in the city.

"It seems like a real economic waste this money leaving Belmont," resident Perry Kennan told the council.

Cities cannot install the devices for revenue generation, however, due to state law.

The program cost the city about \$11,740 a month over the three years and generated about \$14,000 a month for the city, according to a staff report.

Police Chief Dan DeSmidt told the council the program was effective considering the city's current lack of resources and the difficulty in enforcing traffic at the two intersections on Ralston where the cameras are placed.

The cameras should be gone by July when the contract officially ends, DeSmidt said.

About 173 red light camera tickets were issued a month during the three years of the program, or about six a day.

In other business, the council approved a nearly \$60 million budget for fiscal year 2013-14 Tuesday night. The city's general fund revenue is expected to be \$17.6 million next year as the city expects to spend about \$15.5 million on public safety, parks and recreation and other programs.

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