October 30, 2020

To the residents of Grand Rapids, MI, the Mayor, City Commissioners and City Manager,

We are a broad coalition of movements, organizers and organizations who share a common commitment to the safety and well-being of our communities. We are writing to tell you to vote “No” on the adoption of ShotSpotter technologies. For years, the Grand Rapids Police Department (GRPD) has been trying to secure the resources to install ShotSpotter. We had grave concerns about the adoption of mass-surveillance technologies then, and those concerns continue to resonate in the present.

Our concerns are articulated here:

- The proposed plan by the GRPD to “engage” the community is farcical. Hosting two last-minute town halls, scheduled days beforehand, and just prior to a major election should not be considered effective community engagement. This is completely at odds with the GRPD’s strategic plan which articulates effective engagement as one of their priorities. Community engagement is long, sustained work. Additional time is necessary to fully educate neighbors about the implications of adopting such a technology, along with time necessary to appropriately craft the policy safeguards that would protect their interest. Neither of these two things are possible in the proposed timeline by the GRPD.
- Our neighborhoods should not be subjected to mass surveillance. Implementing ShotSpotter will turn public spaces into sites of continued surveillance. There is a profound lack of clarity on how ShotSpotter footage/alerts will be used, and whether or not peripheral activities that amount to a “violation” will be prosecutable.
- ShotSpotter is an imperfect technology. As an alert system, enforcement is still up to police officers and allows for police officers to lawfully stop and search community members who might be in the vicinity. This is especially troubling given that multiple reports have shown that racial bias in GRPD is prevalent (Traffic Stop Study, MDCR investigation). We believe that ShotSpotter will grant GRPD unilateral permission to violate the privacy and safety of our neighbors. Furthermore, it continues to be reactive to crime while neglecting to come up with proactive solutions that help heal community.

In light of this, we are asking for the following:

- Require GRPD to revise their community engagement calendar to allow for community education on the implications of ShotSpotter.
  - Community engagement should not begin until the week of November 9.
- Vote No on the adoption of ShotSpotter
- Utilize CARES Act dollars to invest in data-transparency capacity of the GRPD, not in surveillance technologies of communities.
- Require GRPD to publicly articulate how they will use community input to make a decision BEFORE posting a community engagement calendar.

Signed,

Urban Core Collective
Line Up

NAACP Grand Rapids

The Defund the GRPD Coalition

Justice For Black Lives

Equity PAC