

CUTLER BAY

Cutler Bay OK's surveillance cameras at shopping centers

BY PATRICIA MAZZEI

PMAZZEI@MIAMIHERALD.COM

Cutler Bay officials approved a softened measure requiring some shopping centers to install surveillance cameras in a narrow vote late Wednesday -- despite hearing pleas from small business owners against the new regulation.

The law, likely the first of its kind in Florida, will mandate that shopping centers with 25 or more parking spaces set up video surveillance in their parking lot entrances and exits within 18 months.

"I don't think that this is exotic," Mayor Paul Vrooman said. "I don't think that this is cruel."

The council signed off on the rule with a 3-2 vote after more than 90 minutes of discussion and two failed attempts to postpone the vote indefinitely. Vice Mayor Ed MacDougall and Council member Timothy Meerbott voted against.

It was the third time the Town Council considered the camera idea, after staff proposed it in September as a way they said would help deter and solve crimes.

The local and state retail industry, fearing the law would set a precedent for similar moves elsewhere, vigorously lobbied against the ordinance, saying it would raise the cost of business and only displace -- not eliminate -- crime.

Wednesday, a couple of small business owners asked the council to delay the measure until the economy picks up.

"We're having trouble making our rent," said Joyce Menhennet, who runs a family-owned jewelry store. "All the security in the world isn't any good if you don't have business."

But council members did not push back the vote because they said they feared the retail industry would try to get the state Legislature to pass a law prohibiting municipalities from implementing similar camera ordinances. The Florida League of Cities told Cutler Bay retail lobbyists have proposed an early draft of that bill.

Relaxing the original proposal, the board did scrap a requirement that cameras cover the entire parking lot to loosen the restrictions. Council members also agreed to the outline of a plan that would use Cutler Bay money to fund part of the cost, though details of that plan still need to be worked out.