APPLETON POLICE DEPARTMENT
COMPASSION * INTEGRITY * COURAGE

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From: Chief Polly Olson
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Subject: ALPR Technology for the Appleton Police Department

Enhancing Public Safety and Community Trust: The Case for Automated License Plate Reader (ALPR) Technology for the Appleton Police Department

The mission of the Appleton Police Department is to protect life, preserve public safety, reduce crime, and build lasting partnerships with the community. Achieving that mission requires law enforcement to continually evaluate proven tools and technologies that improve effectiveness while respecting individual rights and maintaining public trust.

Automated License Plate Reader (ALPR) technology represents an important advancement in modern policing. ALPR systems provide law enforcement with a focused investigative tool that helps identify vehicles connected to criminal activity, locate missing persons, recover stolen vehicles, and enhance the ability of officers to respond quickly to threats within the community. ALPR technology is a victim-centered public safety tool with clear safeguards, transparency, and accountability.

For Appleton, a growing and diverse community with busy transportation corridors, regional connections, and evolving public safety challenges, ALPR technology has proven its ability to strengthen the Police Department's capacity to prevent and solve crime while allowing officers to work more efficiently.

ALPR Technology Supports Community Safety

Every day, police officers respond to crimes or other incidents where a vehicle is involved. A suspect may flee in a vehicle, a stolen vehicle may be used to commit additional crimes, or a dangerous offender may travel through multiple communities before being located. Traditional investigative methods often depend on eyewitness recollection, delayed reporting, or limited information.

Additionally, one of the most frequent calls for service we handle involves checking on the welfare of individuals who are in crisis, or who may have other conditions contributing to their need for assistance. Often, these individuals are in or operating a vehicle.

ALPR technology provides a timely investigative advantage by automatically capturing license plate information from vehicles traveling through designated locations. When a plate matches a law enforcement alert, such as a stolen vehicle, wanted person, AMBER Alert or vehicle associated with a criminal investigation, the system can notify officers so they can take appropriate action.

ALPR technology does not replace police officers, interviews, investigations, or community partnerships. Instead, it provides officers with another piece of information that can help them make better decisions and respond more effectively.

A Tool to Help Solve Crime and Protect Victims

The most important measure of any policing tool is whether it helps protect victims and improve public safety. ALPR systems have proven valuable in investigations involving:

- Stolen vehicles and vehicle theft rings
- Missing and endangered people
- Fleeing suspects
- Organized criminal activity
- Serious violent crimes
- Drug trafficking investigations
- Repeat offenders
- Traffic incidents
- Property crimes

In many cases, the difference between solving a crime and leaving a victim without answers is the availability of timely information. ALPR technology can provide investigators with leads that otherwise may not exist.

For victims of crime, knowing that law enforcement has every reasonable tool available provides reassurance that their case is receiving the attention and resources it deserves.

Appleton is Safer Because of ALPR Technology

- A23037946-An intoxicated male was walking downtown and intentionally bumped into an individual that he did not know. The male that was bumped into dropped his keys. The male then punched the victim in the face causing the victim to lose consciousness. The victim suffered multiple broken bones. The suspect was completely unknown to the victim. After a review of downtown traffic cameras, Officers were able to identify a description of the vehicle that the suspect used to

leave the scene. ALPR technology provided a license plate for the suspect vehicle. This provided a lead for officers to follow up on. Officers contacted the registered owner who was uncooperative with police and refused to assist with identifying who would have been operating her vehicle at the time of the incident. In the coming weeks a traffic stop was conducted on the vehicle and the suspect in this incident was the driver. He denied involvement in this incident, but video evidence proved otherwise. The suspect lived outside of Appleton. The suspect was arrested for substantial/aggravated battery, disorderly conduct, and a probation violation. Without ALPR technology this case would likely remain unsolved.

- 3/20/2023 - a local agency sent out information regarding a missing person's case that involved a father and their child. Our crime analyst discovered that the vehicle had been in our jurisdiction using ALPR technology. Our crime analyst conducted a larger search and found that the vehicle was in Indianapolis and relayed that information to the investigating agency. That agency was not aware that the vehicle was in Indiana at that time. The father and child were located, and the child was legally placed with an aunt in Florida. The chief of the local agency contacted our crime analyst to thank her for her assistance in locating these individuals.

- 11/15/2022 - investigators began a homicide investigation in the 700 block of W. Summer St. On that day, they identified a possible suspect and a vehicle he was believed to be operating. ALPR was used to determine that the vehicle had passed a camera in Green Bay. Green Bay Police were contacted and quickly located the vehicle in the area near where it had passed an ALPR camera. The vehicle was impounded preserving potential evidence and removing an option for the suspect to evade apprehension. The location of the vehicle opened additional investigative leads within that neighborhood that led to the location of the suspect. He was taken into custody in that neighborhood 5 days after the homicide.

- June – 2025 - Investigators began a sexual assault investigation that involved a child victim. Investigators identified a suspect but were unable to locate him. Investigators canvassed bars and restaurants frequented by the suspect and were able to obtain a license plate for a vehicle the suspect was operating. The plate was entered into ALPR system. The ALPR hit provided a lead to the suspect's location. Investigators were then able to locate the vehicle and conduct surveillance. The suspect was observed entering the vehicle and was taken into custody. At the time the suspect was arrested he had a large amount of cash on his person and evidence suggested he was going to flee the country. Without ALPR technology he may have been able to flee and evade apprehension.

- Traffic related issues and reckless driving have been widely discussed by citizens. Officers have numerous examples of reckless driving vehicles that have fled from officers when they attempted to conduct traffic stops to address their

behavior. ALPR technology has proved critical to holding those operators accountable for their behavior. Without this technology these cases would go unsolved.

- Numerous examples of hit and run accidents that have been solved solely because of ALPR technology.

- Numerous stolen vehicles have been recovered in an efficient and timely manner because of ALPR technology.

- 08/24/2022, Investigators responded to an overdose death investigation. A victim was found deceased from a drug overdose with her young child left alone with her in the apartment. During the investigation a person of interest was identified, and an ALPR hotlist alert was created for their vehicle. Within 6 hours of that alert being created, the vehicle hit on an ALPR camera and officers were able to locate the vehicle and take the operator into custody on a felony warrant. Evidence related to the death investigation was located within the vehicle and seized.

- A23008207-ALPR technology was used to substantiate claims of a violation of a harassment injunction. The victim claimed that the suspect, who lived in Campbellsport, was continually driving past their house. ALPR showed the suspect vehicle in the City of Appleton multiple times during that period.

- A22050376-ALPR technology was used to identify a vehicle involved in a drive by shooting in Appleton. A hotlist entry was created. Green Bay Police were able to locate the vehicle in their jurisdiction after it was identified on one of their cameras. The vehicle was stopped and the suspect was taken into custody. The gun used in the drive by shooting was located inside of the vehicle.

- A25037835 - Numerous domestic abuse cases with P. B., to include a case where he took the VC's vehicle. The license plate was entered into the system when he fled to Georgia. Police were notified when he returned to the area and he was taken into custody.

- A26011907 - Welfare check/missing person/death. Female reported missing by family members. The use of ALPR cameras showed when her vehicle stopped showing up at intersections and indicated the vehicle was still in the area. We focused efforts in the city (drone, retention ponds, area businesses, etc.) and her car was located by detectives at a local business with her deceased inside. ALPR technology kept the investigation of a missing person local and narrowed it to conserve resources and expedite locating her.

In 2025, the Appleton Police Department investigated and/or were dispatched to just over 35,000 calls for services that required a police response. ALPR technology was utilized in just under 2% of these investigations, which were crimes. These 703 investigations resulted in potential criminal charges or were related to criminal offenses or ordinance violations. We were able to make an arrest in 49.6% of these cases, with leads generated with ALPR technology.

Improving Officer Efficiency and Resource Management

Police departments nationwide face increasing demands and limited resources. Officers must prioritize calls for service, investigate crimes, engage with residents, and respond to emergencies. Removal of this tool would undoubtedly increase the amount of time needed on investigations.

The staffing study conducted on behalf of Matrix Consulting last year identified a need to increase investigative related positions in the table of organization. Having access to an ALPR tool adds tenfold value when compared to the cost of additional officers.

ALPR technology allows officers to spend less time searching manually for information and more time on proactive policing and community engagement. Rather than relying solely on officers noticing suspicious vehicles or manually reviewing large amounts of information, ALPR systems can quickly identify relevant investigative leads.

This improves efficiency without reducing the importance of human judgment. This technology identifies possible connections; trained officers evaluate the information, conduct investigations, and make enforcement decisions.

Strengthening Regional Collaboration

ALPR technology can strengthen cooperation among neighboring law enforcement agencies by providing timely information when authorized and appropriate. Regional collaboration improves the ability of agencies to locate stolen property, identify dangerous offenders, and protect communities throughout the region.

Appleton is part of a larger public safety network. A coordinated approach helps ensure criminals cannot easily avoid detection simply by crossing
jurisdictional lines, leading to increased accountability for criminal activity and improving the ability of law enforcement agencies to apprehend offenders.

It is imperative for the police department to have stringent guidelines while considering data-sharing agreements with other police agencies. Regional agreements are preferred over statewide and national sharing. The Appleton Police Department has updated policy language to consider data sharing on a case-by-case basis with other law enforcement agencies.

Protecting Privacy Through Responsible Policies

The implementation of ALPR technology must be guided by transparency, accountability, and clear safeguards. The use of ALPR systems should include strong policies governing:

- Authorized users
- Approved law enforcement purposes
- Data retention periods
- Access controls
- Audit trails
- Oversight and review
- Prohibited uses

All the above points have been addressed in current policy. Police department leaders agree this tool requires close monitoring and a robust audit trail to ensure compliance and deter misuse.

ALPR systems are not designed to track law-abiding residents' daily movements or create a record of innocent activity. They are investigative tools that should be used under clearly defined rules focused on legitimate public safety purposes.

The Appleton Police Department is eager to adopt ALPR technology with a comprehensive policy framework that balances effective policing with constitutional protections and community expectations.

Addressing Common Concerns

Some concerns about ALPR technology focus on privacy and government surveillance. Those concerns deserve thoughtful consideration. Public trust is essential, and technology must always be implemented responsibly.

However, rejecting a valuable public safety tool solely because it can be misused ignores the safeguards available and the benefits it provides. The solution is not to eliminate technology, it is to establish appropriate rules, oversight, and accountability.

The same principle applies to many tools already used by law enforcement. Radios, computers, forensic databases, body-worn cameras, and emergency communication systems all require policies and training. ALPR technology should be treated the same way: as a tool that must be managed responsibly.

Members of this department have proven they will take swift action rooted in transparency and integrity when handling cases involving the misuse of this technology. They did not hesitate when difficult, ethical decisions were required ultimately resulting in criminal

charges against a Menasha officer. Appleton Police Department leaders were quick to inform the public and are committed to ensuring transparency around this, and all other, law enforcement technologies.

Conclusion

The Appleton Police Department has a responsibility to provide effective, professional, and accountable public safety services. ALPR technology supports that responsibility by providing officers with a tool that provides timely information that can help prevent crime, locate offenders, recover stolen property, and protect victims.

When combined with strong policies, transparency, and responsible oversight, ALPR cameras represent a modern policing tool that enhances, not replaces, the relationship between law enforcement and the community.

The question is not whether technology should be part of public safety. The question is whether we will use proven technology thoughtfully and responsibly to better protect the people we serve.

By implementing clear policies and accountability measures from the outset, the Appleton Police Department can set a responsible framework for the use of emerging public safety technologies, demonstrating how innovation, transparency, and community trust can work together and serving as a model for other communities considering similar tools.