

Palm Bay red light runners, beware

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PALM BAY - Drivers who disobey red traffic lights at certain intersections soon will be captured on video.

A majority of the City Council on Jan. 8 approved the use of red light cameras at these six intersections:

- Palm Bay and Minton roads
- Minton Road and Emerson Drive
- Minton and Malabar roads
- San Filippo Drive and Malabar Road
- Malabar Road and Babcock Street
- Babcock Street and Palm Bay Road

These intersections were chosen because they had the most red light running incidents with the most serious accidents, city manager Lee Feldman said in a report for the council's Jan. 8 meeting.

"We're talking about hopefully starting (the red light camera program) in March or April," Police Chief Bill Berger said Jan. 16.

A five-year agreement between the city and Beverly, Mass.-based Gatso USA calls for the company to set up and maintain the cameras at no cost to the city.

Officials said the first six months of the cameras' operation will be a time to evaluate the cameras' performance. During this time, drivers who run red lights at the six intersections and are caught on the cameras would receive a warning, but not a monetary fine.

"If an officer is there, he will ticket (red light runners)," Chief Berger said. "If they are caught only on camera, they will receive just a warning."

For the first six months of the program, "We have to make sure the system works," he said.

Stopping drivers from running red lights, rather than issuing tickets, is the goal of the program, Chief Berger said.

Gatso USA will not charge the city any fees during the six-month evaluation period. Afterward, the company would collect \$30 and the city would receive \$95 for every \$125 citation issued to a red light runner.

"When a red light running infraction occurs, Gatso USA reviews the infraction and forwards the pictures and video to the Palm Bay Police Department for review," Mr. Feldman said in his report to the council. "The police department then approves or rejects the infraction and Gatso USA processes all approved violations and issues the citation to the violator."

The city's selection committee chose the company over four other firms based on technical aspects, fees charged and the experience of the company.

Gatso USA has installed more than 45,000 cameras in 60 countries. Palm Bay will be the first Florida city to use the company's cameras.

In Gatso USA's executive summary of its proposal to install the cameras in Palm Bay, company officials noted "We have never lost a court case or administrative hearing because of technology in our 50 years of photo enforcement."