

Case Study Local Government



ORGANIZATION

West University Place (Houston)
& North Richland Hills
(Dallas-Fort Worth)

APPLICATION

City-wide IP Video Surveillance

Texas Municipalities Consolidate Video Security Systems for LENSEC's Seamless IP-based Surveillance Coverage

West University Place (of Houston) and North Richland Hills (greater Dallas-Fort Worth) had similar needs. Both municipalities needed to provide video surveillance for public areas such as parks, recreational areas and other municipal facilities. While the needs were similar, their pre-existing circumstances varied. In the case of North Richland Hills, existing independent video surveillance systems had been piecemealed together using a variety of components over the years. However, in the case of West University Place, there were no existing systems or supporting infrastructure.

THE CHALLENGES

West University Place and North Richland Hills are both affluent communities with their own city governments, police departments, emergency services, water treatment and parks and recreation facilities. Each needed a scalable 21st century solution to provide the necessary security and surveillance services for residents of these two growing communities.

Needed: A Scalable Solution – In West University Place, Gary McFarland, the Director of Information Technology took on the responsibility to define and implement the right security and surveillance solution for his city.

“When I arrived here in 2007, the city didn’t really have any centralized IT management,” he recalled. “But that’s where they wanted to go, so I saw it as an opportunity to develop a needs-based solution that included video surveillance.”

Although the concept of an organized surveillance plan and infrastructure wasn’t entirely novel, it would be a fundamental change for the municipality. “I knew we needed a function-specific, professional system,” McFarland said. “But we didn’t know then what its scope and breadth would end up



The Power of Perspective

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becoming." He was aware, however, of the dramatic advances in IP-based video technology. He also knew that any video surveillance system developed for the city of West University Place would become part of his IT network. McFarland correctly noted that a scalable video surveillance system would satisfy both immediate and future needs. Prior to LENSEC's implementation, the only West University facility that was monitored (albeit haphazardly) was the city's recycling center, where the "home-brewed" system was used to deter illegal dumping of hazardous materials and unrecyclable appliances.

McFarland started his search with his peers within the Texas Association of Government IT Managers. He attended the Government Technology Conference in order to identify potential solution providers with the appropriate experience and expertise to handle not just the current needs in the city of West University Place, but also its future requirements. This focus on a comprehensive forward-thinking solution brought him to LENSEC LLC.

Needed: A Standardized Solution – For Sean Hughes, Emergency Management Homeland Security Coordinator for North Richland Hills, the challenge wasn't the lack of video surveillance. North Richland Hills was facing a similar need for video surveillance at their recreational and municipal facilities. Their specific challenge was multiple standalone systems each implemented at different times with no enforced policy of standardization in software applications, equipment and installation.

"The task at hand, driven by the North Richland Hills police department, was to gather the video sources across the city and find a solution that would allow us to utilize a single piece of software to manage and view the different systems," remembered Hughes. "But we also needed to expand that capability to access and view those systems via non-traditional means – from vehicles and smart phones."

Hughes had been in public safety for more than two decades, so he knew that being able to access a video surveillance system through disparate networks was a critical requirement. But he also knew that North Richland Hills' technology infrastructure excluded an extensive fiber backbone. Therefore, another critical element of the challenge would be to address the requirement for multiple surveillance servers that could eventually be linked over a wide-area network. Hughes' objective was to evolve the system from single-site servers to a single-server system as the city's resources for emergency management and homeland security improved.

Hughes also relied on his peers within Homeland Security Management to point him toward a viable solution provider. It was through this network while attending a vendor conference that he first learned about LENSEC LLC.

"They came out and looked at where we were and what our immediate and future needs were," Hughes recalled. "A major issue at that point in time is that we had suffered a number of crimes that were committed in public places that could easily be covered by cameras."

Once he had identified the right solution provider, Hughes set about establishing a consolidated set of equipment standards. "That was a big step for us," Hughes admitted. They were moving to IP-based cameras from random analog equipment that was initially specified and implemented largely under budget constraints rather than security vulnerabilities.

"Trying to do it on the cheap is what painted us into a corner to begin with," Hughes explained. "Someone would have a couple thousand dollars left in a project and decide to buy a couple of cameras and a DVR. But what we ended up with was a two-camera system like none other in the city, with obsolete software that couldn't be fixed when it crashed."

“... one of the key values I get from LENSEC is their support of our systems. They know when a camera is offline before I do.”

– Gary McFarland, Director of IT
West University Place



THE SOLUTIONS

Both municipalities recognized the viability of the LENSEC solution almost immediately. It was flexible, affordable customer-centric and allowed for a phased implementation plan. Both McFarland and Hughes remember how easy LENSEC was to work with in accommodating their specific needs.

For Hughes, the driving factor was that the solution be IP-based and standardized so that the various systems could eventually be accessible via the city's IP network. As for McFarland, the most important aspect was a combination of scalability and overall ease-of-use. Both users wanted to make sure that their video surveillance system could grow as their needs grew, while the systems' users across various departments would each be able to view the surveillance system at their sites.

West University Place – McFarland found that there had been various requests for city-wide video surveillance but there was no funding available for these submittals. He was, however, able to include video surveillance for both the Park and Recreation Center facilities and parking areas as part of a proposed capital improvement project addressed in an upcoming bond election. In this manner, various physical design requirements of the system could be accommodated from the beginning in the architecture and general contracting plans.

Meanwhile, the recycling center was having problems monitoring the dumping of hazardous materials and large unrecyclable appliances. But the recycling center also had limited funds and although McFarland knew what he wanted in a system, he was not prepared to purchase an enterprise-wide solution at that time. Therefore, the recycling center became the pilot project for LENSEC's long-range enterprise-wide solution for West University Place.

“LENSEC went to bat for us,” McFarland said. “We asked if they could do the recycling center project for what we had budgeted and they did.” LENSEC installed four IP-based cameras and integrated the system with city hall via wireless telecommunications. For McFarland, the implementation of the recycling center system was an apt demonstration of LENSEC's competence and commitment to providing a turnkey solution.

The next project incorporated into West University Place's video surveillance system was the water and wastewater facility. There, they needed to monitor the lifting facility, the perimeter of the treatment facility site, the outflow and the storage of potentially hazardous chemicals, as well as a pair of off-site elevated water tanks. Because of the need for fiber infrastructure (planned for a later date), the immediate solution was to implement a standalone server and a nine-camera system to provide onsite surveillance coverage.

For the recreation center complex and its grounds, the scope of the project required that it be broken into a multi-phase implementation plan. In addition to viewing the parking lots, the 30,000-square foot facility features a large cardio exercise room, a free weight area, four classrooms, a competition-size swimming pool, locker rooms and visitor lobby, all of which needed to be monitored and recorded. LENSEC's solution called for 20 cameras and two audio capture points. The second phase will include video surveillance coverage for the playing fields and parks.

The last phase of the initial scope for West University Place's video surveillance system will replace the existing cameras on the city's Police Department system with IP-based equipment monitored and archived through the LENSEC platform.

North Richland Hills – According to Hughes, the LENSEC surveillance system at North Richland Hills currently covers

five locations and includes approximately 30 cameras. These installations were retrofitted to replace legacy systems covering the city's tennis complex, the courts facility, the North Richland Hills water park, library and City Hall. The future growth of the surveillance system will include installations in the city's detention center as well as a new project for the recreational center.

"All of our cameras are being installed in a compatible manner to tie into our LENSEC system," Hughes explained. "This means as we change out our camera systems from analog to IP-based, we are actively working toward our goal of being able to access any camera on any of our surveillance systems across the city from multiple locations on multiple devices."

THE RESULTS

Both McFarland and Hughes are pleased with the solution. Deciding factors for success were the scalability and flexibility of the systems, LENSEC's intuitive graphical user interface and their customer-centric support.

"I know there are other systems out there," McFarland mused. "But one of the key values I get from LENSEC is their support of our systems. They know when a camera is offline before I do."

"The combination of LENSEC's turnkey solution, managed services and proactive maintenance has been a successful formula," McFarland added.

Where McFarland preferred to rely on LENSEC's subject matter experts to guide him in regards to specifying system hardware, Hughes liked having the option of specifying the hardware needed to bring his video surveillance systems up to date. He relied on LENSEC to provide the right customer-centric application solution to integrate his disparate systems into one accessible wide-area network solution.

"When we first started looking for a solution, we talked to other vendors," Hughes allowed. "But LENSEC's solution was by far the most comprehensive and least complicated from a user perspective. We liked the graphical representation of the various facilities and the ease of accessing those camera views. Overall, we're pleased with our LENSEC system because it does exactly what we wanted it to do."

Hughes offered a final word of advice for prospective LENSEC customers. "It's important to bring in your video surveillance solution provider early in the process when you're conceptualizing the project," he emphasized. "... And it's equally important to bring in your data processing people, along with the building or facility occupant at that same point to establish a working partnership. That way all stakeholders will speak the same language and understand the scope and the needs of the system integration."

LENSEC CITY-WIDE TURNKEY VIDEO SURVEILLANCE SOLUTIONS

LENSEC provides turnkey video surveillance systems on-time and on-budget with minimal impact to daily operations.

Services provided include:

- Site Audit
- System Design
- Software and Hardware
- Installation and Project Management
- User Training
- Ongoing Service and Support

Municipalities present unique security challenges. LENSEC's local government experience and the deep video surveillance system expertise of its employees are distinct assets when it comes to design, network engineering, software development, installation, maintenance and large scale project management of city-wide surveillance solutions.

1800 Bering Drive
Suite 751
Houston, TX 77057

Phone 713.395.0800
Fax 713.395.0597
Toll-free 800.348.4234

lensec.com



The Power of Perspective