

"Police-community relations in Oakland are terrible," says Ali Winston, a reporter with the East Bay Express. "They have been terrible for a long time."

But Winston and his colleague Darwin BondGraham were still not fully prepared for what they would discover in the summer of 2012, when they were going through court records and council papers.

Find us on Facebook

"We saw some things that raised questions. Why are they running fibre optic cables out there? That kind of thing," says BondGraham.

Winston recognised the name of a security company on a council agenda and knew immediately what they were dealing with - a Domain Awareness Centre.



Most cities, including Oakland, have cameras monitoring traffic intersections and public areas. But a Domain Awareness Centre, or DAC, is far more sophisticated. It is still based around a bank of screens, but the camera feeds are augmented by data from weather reports, shipping movements, social media chatter, email records, emergency calls and other data sources.

The port of Oakland had been given federal funds in 2008 to build a DAC as part of a post-9/11 push to protect critical infrastructure from terrorist attack.

At some point, the city council decided to extend the system to cover the whole of Oakland and its population of 400,000 people.

"The feeling from the port seemed to be, 'We are building these really cool systems, why don't we make them city-wide?'," says BondGraham.

Hundreds of new cameras would be installed across the city and data would be incorporated from number plate readers, gunshot-detection microphones, social media, and, in later phases, facial recognition software and programs that can recognise people from the way they walk.