

The News Tribune

[Next Story >](#)

Pierce Transit pioneers switch to renewable gas

Pierce County advances 'pre-emptive' drone plan

Published: August 17, 2013



A small unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) by DJI innovations flies during a demonstration at the Association for Unmanned Vehicle Systems International exhibition in Washington, August 13, 2013.

JASON REED — Reuters

Measure would require agencies, including law enforcement, to follow 'state and federal law'

By STEVE MAYNARD — Staff writer

Pierce County Councilman Dan Roach is troubled that drones could be used by the government — including the one he represents — to spy on people and violate their privacy rights as the remotely operated aircraft become more available and affordable.

That's why he wants to place limits on drones while still allowing law enforcement to use them with a search warrant or other legal authority.

"You can fly a drone over a person's property and you have no privacy," Roach, R-Bonney Lake, said. "I want to hold Pierce County accountable and have this as precedent-setting legislation."

For example, he wants to prevent the county's Planning and Land Services department from using drones without legal basis to determine whether people have permits for what's on their properties.

The Sheriff's Department and the Planning Department both say they have no drones and no plans to use them.

A majority of the County Council favors the measure, which Roach calls "pre-emptive."

The Public Safety and Human Services Committee voted 4-1 last week to recommend the proposal. The full council could take action in about a month.

The measure says that no county department or agency shall use a drone or other remotely operated aircraft to gather evidence of illegal conduct "except as authorized by state and federal law."

The proposal, called "freedom from unwarranted surveillance," spells out that law enforcement is not prohibited from using drones when legally justified.

The addition to the county code would allow a person to seek civil remedies over the use of a drone in the event of a violation.

"I just want to make sure there's some repercussion," Roach said.

Council member Connie Ladenburg, D-Tacoma, cast the lone "no" vote.

"I don't think it's needed, to be honest," Ladenburg said. "Who is this legislation trying to protect? Where is the emergency?"

The Sheriff's Department already operates two planes for patrol and search-and-rescue operations. But it doesn't use them to spy on people's property, Ladenburg said.

Law enforcement also should be able to use a drone, see something suspicious and take action as long as it follows court standards, she said. The proposal "limits the ability in the future for the sheriff do his job with the technology available," Ladenburg said.

Roach said that without regulations, government could target anyone for surveillance, violating privacy rights.

"To think this is not a concern is to bury your head in the sand," he said.

From the ranks of private citizens to the federal government, drone use is on the rise. And so are concerns over privacy.

In June, FBI Director Robert Mueller acknowledged the bureau has used remotely operated aerial drones for surveillance in the United States. He said that the government needs to develop guidelines as use of drones grows.

A measure to regulate drones failed to make it through the Legislature this year.

Sheriff Paul Pastor has said drones raise privacy and constitutional issues that must be reconciled with how law enforcement could use them.

Roach said he's not concerned that Pastor would abuse his surveillance authority if the department had a drone. The councilman said drones are bound to be used by more law enforcement agencies over the next few years to save money in personnel costs.

That's why the council needs to put safeguards in place now, he said.

"In the right hands, it's an incredible tool," he said.

Anyone can buy a personal drone with limited range at an electronics store.

Knowing her son was working on the drone proposal, Sen. Pam Roach, R-Auburn, recently bought a \$300 drone at a store. She flew it on her property outside Auburn for a family reunion on the Fourth of July, Dan Roach said.

The drone's camera captured images that they watched on an iPad, Dan Roach said.

His proposal originally banned the use of drones by private individuals and entities for evidence-gathering purposes. But the committee nixed those references at the advice of the county Prosecutor's Office over what could be realistically enforced.

"By keeping it small and keeping our departments accountable, that's the first step," Roach said.

Steve Maynard: 253-597-8647
steve.maynard@thenewstribune.com
[@TNTstevemaynard](https://twitter.com/TNTstevemaynard)

[Back to Top](#)
[< Previous Story](#)



[Next Story >](#)

State mulls privatizing websites, printing



Pierce Transit pioneers switch to renewable gas

[Email Newsletters >](#)

[Manage newsletter subscriptions](#)

[Tablets >](#)

[Apps and services for tablet devices](#)

[Mobile >](#)

[Apps and services for your mobile phone](#)

[Social Media >](#)

[Get updates via Facebook and Twitter](#)

[e-Edition >](#)

[Your daily paper delivered to your computer](#)

[Home Delivery >](#)

[Manage your home delivery account](#)

[Digital Subscriptions >](#)

[Manage your online subscriptions](#)