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Shootings are down in Baltimore. What is ShotSpotter hearing?



By **MATHEW SCHUMER**

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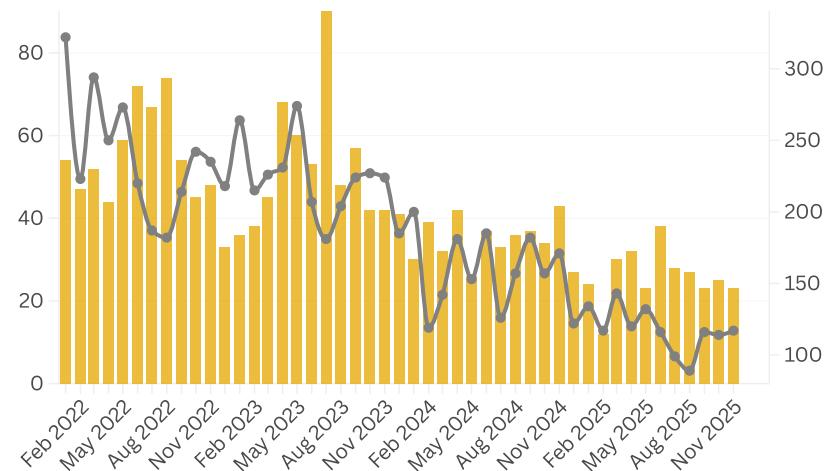
Baltimore officials and police are touting the city's multimillion-dollar gunshot detection system — though officers found evidence of a shooting after fewer than a quarter of the system's alerts in 2025.

Some researchers and advocates have critiqued its false-positive rate and condemned what they characterized as overdeployment in majority-Black neighborhoods. The Baltimore Police Department and other city officials, however, see the city's ShotSpotter system as an integral piece of its gun violence response strategy.

ShotSpotter Alerts in Baltimore

After a spike in gunshot alerts, monthly alerts from the city's Shotspotter program have been on a steady decline since January 2022.

Gunshot Alerts Shootings



Source: Baltimore Police Department • Chart: Mathew Schumer

Baltimore first contracted ShotSpotter technology in 2018, and in 2024, the city's spending board unanimously approved a three-year contract for the technology for \$2.1 million with the system's parent company, California-based SoundThinking Inc.

The system is made up of over 200 sensors throughout its coverage area in Baltimore, comprising 10 square miles of the city. That amounts to five miles each in East and West Baltimore, with more than 200 sensors placed throughout the area.

The sensors are always on and listening for gunshots — using artificial intelligence to identify them and triangulate their location and quickly notify the police.

Crime data shows that shootings dropped by more than half from 2022 to 2025, while data obtained via a Public Information Act request shows that alerts issued by Baltimore's ShotSpotter system dipped at a similar rate. But its coverage area is limited to a relatively small portion of the city, in parts of East and West Baltimore.

"We are working hard to treat every discharging event like it could have possibly been a shooting, even if we don't have a victim," said Sydney Koeppel, who supervises the intelligence and analysis section of BPD's Crime Gun Intelligence Center Unit.

She added that ShotSpotter not only hastens the response of police officers to shootings but can also identify shootings that may not have been reported to 911.

Research indicates that gunshots are vastly underreported to emergency responders, and SoundThinking has long marketed ShotSpotter as a way to help law enforcement agencies cover that gap.

However, the technology does not always get it right.

Measuring ShotSpotter's effectiveness

According to ShotSpotter data for 2025 obtained by The Baltimore Sun, the city's system issued just over 1,300 gunshot alerts in 2025, with just under 300 of those alerts leading to officers discovering evidence of a shooting or firearm discharge.

Among those alerts, 134 led to officers finding nonfatal shooting victims, and 47 led to the recovery of homicide victims.

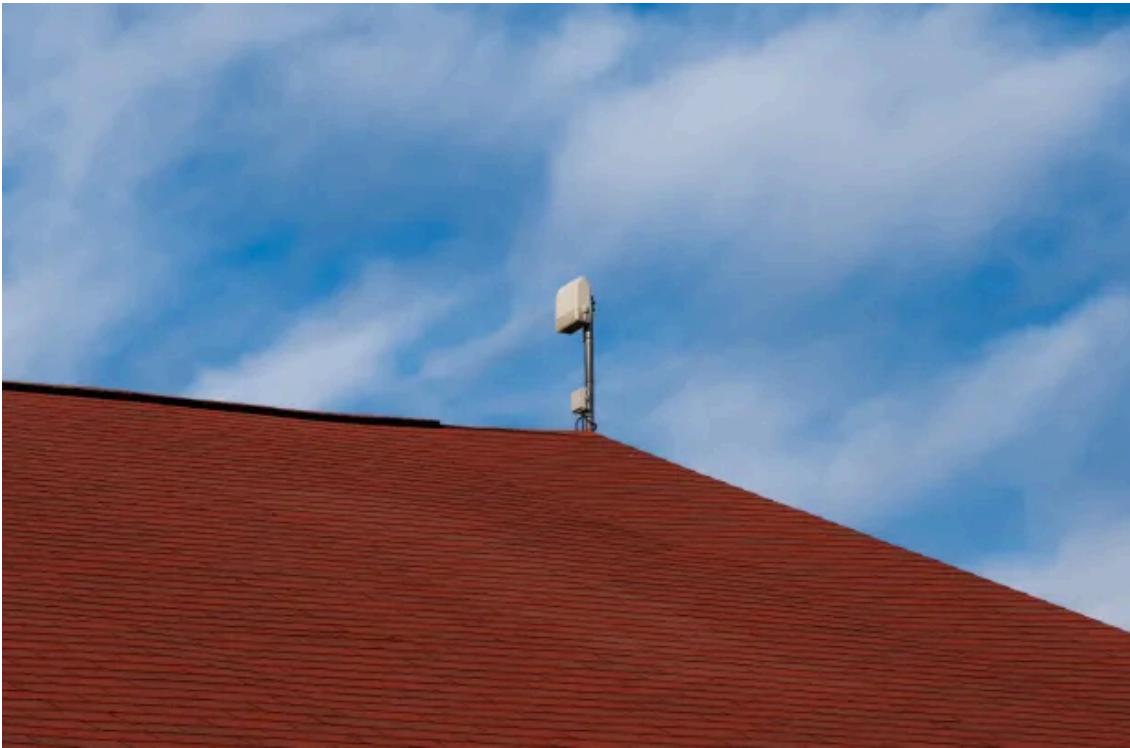
But BPD spokesperson Lindsey Eldridge said the program shouldn't be judged on the number of alerts associated with actual crimes, but instead by the number of scenes it can get officers to quickly and the lives they can save.

Eldridge mentioned a mass shooting over the summer in which a 5-year-old girl was shot in Baltimore's Central Park neighborhood as an example of ShotSpotter's important role in police response to shootings in the city.

She said that because the system hastened the response of BPD and first responders, officers were able to arrive quickly and transport the girl to a nearby hospital, where she was treated for wounds that, if left untreated for much longer, would have required the medical team to amputate her leg.

Koeppel additionally mentioned that ShotSpotter has enabled the department to work with the Baltimore State's Attorney's Office to charge suspects in shootings that didn't even involve a victim.

But incidents like these also give rise to critiques of the technology and how it is being used in criminal



A ShotSpotter sensor stands on top of the Inner Court Ministries building on Kavanaugh Street in Sandtown-Winchester neighborhood. (Surya Vaidy/Staff)

Skepticism of the technology

In one Chicago case reported on by the Associated Press in 2021, a ShotSpotter alert was used as evidence to imprison a 65-year-old man for murder—only for him to be released a year later after a judge ruled that the prosecutors' evidence was insufficient. Chicago Mayor Brandon Johnson said in 2024 that the city was renewing its contract with ShotSpotter, citing that case, as well as [research](#) concerning the city's use of the system that called into question its reliability.

Jennifer Dineen, an associate professor at the University of Connecticut's Department of Public Policy, researched over 16 years' worth of data on ShotSpotter's use in cities across America. She found that the technology had no significant impact on homicide statistics or arrest rates.

She said that she wasn't surprised by the low percentage of ShotSpotter alerts leading to a crime report in Baltimore, which she says mirrors rates in other cities using the technology.

"There's no evidence to show that this investment is producing the outcomes that [cities] hoped it would," said Dineen.

A [subsequent audit](#) into New York City's ShotSpotter program by the city's comptroller determined that the technology's alerts only yielded tangible results 13% of the time, representing "a potential waste of [police] resources."

Nevertheless, the city [renewed](#) its contract with SoundThinking in February 2025 for another three years.

Baltimore Mayor Brandon Scott [said in 2021](#) that he is "the biggest skeptic" of the system, though he ultimately voted in favor of extending the city's contract with SoundThinking through December 2026.

In a statement emailed to The Sun, Scott spokesman Jonas Poggi said the mayor has since recognized the value of Baltimore's ShotSpotter system and its ability to speed up BPD's response to gun violence. He also noted that BPD regularly tracks the system's metrics to ensure it is being used efficiently.

discuss Baltimore's gunshot detection system.

"These data were considered before the contract renewal in 2024 and will be considered if BPD looks to renew the contract later this year," Poggi said.

Where are the shots spotted?

ShotSpotter alert data from 2025 provides a comprehensive view of the system's coverage area, mostly where its sensors are located in East and West Baltimore.

ShotSpotter Alerts by Baltimore Neighborhood

Baltimore's ShotSpotter sensors issued the most alerts in the city's Sandtown-Winchester and Upton neighborhoods, though it covers only 10 square miles of the city.

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Source: Baltimore Police Department, ACLU •

Chart: Mathew Schumer

Dots represent ShotSpotter sensor location

based on data leaked in 2023

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Those sensors' exact locations are unknown, since SoundThinking's contract with the city says the company will not share that data with the police or public and "will challenge any subpoenas for [the] location data."

A spokesperson for SoundThinking Inc. told The Sun in a statement that the company doesn't share the sensors' locations out of an abundance of caution in the statement.

"Revealing sensor locations would make our equipment vulnerable to vandalism or harm that could disable gunshot detection in the communities we serve, compromise confidentiality agreements with private property owners who permit installations on their premises, and risk misuse of sensors as investigative surveillance tools similar to CCTV," read the statement.

The spokesperson did not address why Baltimore's contract bars the company from sharing the locations with police or city government and whether that policy is commonplace in its contracts with other cities.

However, The Baltimore Sun obtained a leaked set of sensor locations from 2023, showing that most of the devices are placed in East and West Baltimore, with some in Midtown, Downtown and South Baltimore.

The location data shows Baltimore's Sandtown-Winchester and Belair-Edison neighborhoods have the most

Those two neighborhoods happen to have some of the [highest proportions](#) of Black residents in Baltimore, according to census data.

The system's rate of false positives may be a liability for those neighborhoods, said Dineen, adding that cases like these unnecessarily bring police to communities that are already policed disproportionately, potentially setting the stage for confrontation between officers and community members.

"That is bringing law enforcement more frequently to these communities that have been historically underinvested in," Dineen said.

Councilman Mark Conway, who chairs the Baltimore City Council's Public Safety Committee, told The Sun that he recognized these issues with the city's ShotSpotter program but thinks that the technology is an asset to Baltimore. He said city officials should reconsider how it is being implemented, and make sure it is being used successfully and equitably.

"I think it's always important for us to think about [building] upon what we have," Conway said, "and have the additional capacity to respond to gunfire in other parts of the city."

Conway said that he and the council haven't priced out what an expansion or overhaul of the ShotSpotter program would look like, but that the city is going to have to weigh out the potential cost and logistical considerations.

Have a news tip? Mathew Schumer at mschumer@baltsun.com, 443-890-7423 and on X as [@mmmschumer](#).



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