

Village poised to act on law restricting sex offenders

Written by Carol Pomeday

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But committee cannot agree on distance needed from protected areas

The Village of Belgium's Public Safety Committee has recommended that the Village Board adopt an ordinance that restricts where convicted child sex offenders are allowed to live in the village.

The proposed ordinance will be considered by the board Monday, Jan. 10. If it is adopted, the law will not affect convicted sex offenders who currently live in the village.

The committee said the village could become a magnet for sex offenders if no ordinance is enacted because surrounding communities have adopted restrictive laws.

After a lengthy discussion with residents on Dec. 14 and a presentation by Capt. Dave Guss of the Ozaukee County Sheriff's Department, the committee unanimously recommended an ordinance similar to one recently adopted by the Village of Fredonia.

Fredonia's ordinance prohibits sex offenders whose victims were children from living within 500 feet of parks, schools, child-care centers, youth activity centers, athletic fields, recreation trails and school walking zones or within 500 feet of another child sex offender.

The ordinance also prohibits those offenders and people convicted of a sexually violent crime from living in the village unless they lived in Ozaukee County prior to committing the crimes.

However, the Belgium committee stopped short of specifying the distance such offenders should live from the restricted areas.

A Green Bay ordinance prohibits a sex offender whose victims were children from living within 2,000 feet of places where children congregate, including bus stops.

Belgium Trustee Vickie Boehnlein, who initially objected to adopting such an ordinance, proposed the distance be 2,000 feet.

"I'm at the point where I think having something is a wise action," Boehnlein said.

Resident Christy Peterson, who lives in a neighborhood where a sex offender who preyed on children lives, supported the 2,000-foot restriction as did Trustee Jeff Ritter.

But Trustee Clem Gottsacker objected when he learned it would basically exclude such offenders from living anywhere in the village.

Guss said ordinances that are too restrictive can backfire and cause authorities to lose track of sex offenders.

"If you make it too restrictive, we're concerned they will go underground and not honestly report where they live," Guss said.

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“There is no problem with someone who is on extended supervision. They usually have the same restrictions as in the ordinances. Once a year, the parole officer or we knock on doors to make sure they live where they say they do.

“But when they’re off supervision, those rules don’t apply and nobody has the time to check on all of them. When they’re off parole, it’s tough to know where they are. We prefer knowing where they are.”

However, Guss said, he understands the village’s desire not to be the last community in the area without restrictions on where they can live.