

Trustees assure residents they will have ample chance for input on proposed restrictions

After nearly a year of debate, Village of Fredonia officials are on the threshold of adopting an ordinance that would restrict where convicted sex offenders can live in the community.

Taking its lead from the Public Safety Committee, the Village Board last week asked the village attorney to draft an ordinance that would prohibit sex offenders from living near schools, parks and child-care centers.

Trustees were intentionally vague on some of the details of the proposed law, saying they would debate the specifics once a draft ordinance is presented to them.

One of the unsettled specifics is how far offenders will have to be from protected areas.

The Public Safety Committee decided last week to use a 500-foot restriction, although Trustee Scott Ehaney said he wouldn't go so far as to say the distance was a recommendation from the committee.

"There has been pretty passionate discussion, and the committee felt it was time to bring the question to the board," Ehaney said.

"I still have some reservations. I wouldn't say the 500 feet was a recommendation as much as it was seen as a starting point for discussion."

During the committee debate, Ehaney said research and even some law-enforcement officials have said residency ordinances have not been effective in protecting communities from sex offenders.

Still, residents have shown up in significant numbers during every committee discussion of the issue. Parents who attended last week's committee meeting forced consideration of the 500-foot restriction.

They also noted that an increasing number of communities have adopted sex offender restrictions, most recently Random Lake.

Sex-offender law sent to attorney

Written by Mark Jaeger

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Village President Joe Short suggested the village's ordinance be modeled after one adopted by the Village of Grafton, although that law establishes a 1,000-foot restriction.

"I think Grafton has a pretty good ordinance. It seems to address the important points," Short said.

Fredonia and Grafton use the same law firm, Houseman, Feind LLP, as their village attorney.

Short also warned that the ongoing debate about residency restrictions could soon be rendered moot, because a law — Senate Bill 548 — that would remove local control over where sex offenders are allowed to live is working its way through the legislative process in Madison.

One of the provisions of the proposed state law would reduce the protected area to as little as 100 feet from schools and parks.

Still, trustees were intrigued by a provision in the Random Lake ordinance that allows sex offenders to appeal the restrictions if special circumstances exist.

Such leniency worried Trustee Don Dohrwardt.

"That could bring liability to us because we don't really have the expertise to determine if an exemption should be given," Dohrwardt said.

Officials said their consideration of the residency restriction ordinance would be very deliberate.

Dohrwardt said the final draft of the ordinance should be considered during a committee of the whole meeting of the Village Board, where no action could be taken.

If the ordinance can be worded to satisfy all trustees, adoption could come at a subsequent board meeting.

Concerned residents would be invited to the initial meeting to offer comments.

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“I want to make sure we get all the input possible and get all of our ducks in order,” Dohrwardt said.

Final adoption of the ordinance is expected to come during the board’s second meeting in April.