

Village won't override weapon law

Written by MARK JAEGER

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Following recommendation of insurance company, officials choose not to ban guns in public buildings

The Village of Saukville's Public Safety Committee has decided to sidestep the controversy over outlawing concealed weapons in village buildings.

As other communities wrestle with how to implement Wisconsin's new concealed-carry law, village officials asked whether steps should be taken to ban weapons from government buildings.

"There is no one in law enforcement right now who can answer all the questions on the concealed-carry law," Police Chief Bill Meloy told the committee prior to the state law going into effect on Tuesday.

"I've had calls every day on how the law will be implemented and I have been telling people to wait until we see the language in the rules released by the state."

Although the law allows people who have completed approved training to carry concealed weapons, Meloy noted that the privilege does not extend to courthouses, police facilities, jails or schools.

The committee was more concerned with whether steps should be taken to keep guns out of Village Hall and other municipal facilities.

Trustee Joe Caban, who identified himself as a member of the National Rifle Association, asked committee members if they had considered placing additional restrictions on bringing weapons into public buildings.

"Private business owners can restrict access to their buildings. Why wouldn't we want to take similar steps to prevent people from bringing weapons into our buildings?" Caban asked.

"Should somebody be able to carry a gun into the library or Village Hall? I support the concealed-carry law, but does someone need to bring a gun there?"

Meloy said the answer to that question appeared to be summarized in a short e-mail from the village's insurance carrier.

"If you put up a sign, it's up to you to enforce it," wrote Roberta Olson of EMC Insurance.

"It would not be wise to have signs up (saying weapons are prohibited) and it will increase the village's liability."

Trustee Dave Maglio, an Ozaukee County sheriff's deputy and gun-safety instructor, readily saw

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the wisdom of the insurance company's warning.

"I don't think we have the resources to check everyone who comes into the library or Village Hall. If we post a sign saying guns are not allowed, it becomes our liability," Maglio said.

Trustee Mike Krocka shared Maglio's concern about the implications of banning weapons.

"If we post signs, we would be required to have metal detectors or pat people down when they come into our buildings," Krocka said.

Officials explained that the liability would occur if someone should bring a weapon into a village building and cause harm, while everyone else abides by the posted restriction on the presumption it would be enforced.

Committee member Tom Kamenick, an attorney, said the state law leaves the village immune from liability in such incidents if no signs are posted in municipal buildings.

"I am strongly opposed to banning weapons in public buildings," Kamenick said.

"I have never seen statistics that show allowing concealed weapons makes an area more dangerous. In fact, the numbers show just the opposite ... besides, it is a Constitutional right."

"Criminals do prefer unarmed victims," Maglio added.

On Tuesday, the Village Board accepted the committee's recommendation that no steps be taken to bar weapons in village facilities.

Trustees did make a minor tweak to the village ordinance which had banned concealed weapons in parks.