

Guestcolumn: Sex-offender ordinance deserves more discussion, research (3.18.07)

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Guest column: Sex-offender ordinance deserves more discussion, research

By Barbara Shiffer, Guest columnist

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The city of Green Bay's proposed plan for sexual offender residency restrictions has sounded an alarm and thrown light on a real problem. But finding real solutions to this problem is no easy matter.

The new zoning ordinance proposal is an attempt to do something about the disproportionately high percentage of Brown County's sex offenders living in Green Bay. But we need to ask if there is a more effective way to keep children safe.

According to the U.S. Department of Justice Center for Sex Offender Management, there is no evidence indicating that residency restrictions improve the safety of children. Research has been done in Colorado and Minnesota on the proximity of offenders to children.

The research found no correlation between where an offender lives and re-offending.

In Iowa the number of sex offenders failing to register has more than doubled since the state enacted a 2,000-foot residency restriction law.

This is one reason among many that led the Iowa State Prosecutors Association, the Iowa State Association of Counties, and the Iowa Sheriffs and Deputies Association to attempt to repeal the residency restriction law.

The state of Kansas, after seeing the unintended consequences of residency restriction laws in other states, has placed a moratorium on local governments from passing similar ordinances until more effective public policy can be found.

Before the Green Bay City Council votes to enact the proposed new zoning ordinance, there needs to be more time given to discussion among the political leaders of Green Bay and surrounding communities and with the Department of Corrections.

The proposal needs to be revisited in light of all available evidence to ensure the most effective plan possible for increasing public safety.

In order to find real solutions that will keep Green Bay a safe place to raise children, we need to think and act as one metropolitan community.

We cannot allow Green Bay to become an island of difficulties in the midst of outlying municipalities where public transportation, affordable housing and social services are scarce.

There are leaders in the city of Green Bay who are wonderfully gifted problem-solvers and visionaries and who care deeply about our community.

I trust that they will be joined by the entire regional community in finding effective solutions to a problem that involves all of us.

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