

## **M.C. mayor: Restricting access may be key**

*By JOHN SKIPPER, Of The Globe Gazette*

MASON CITY — Some Mason City officials think residency restrictions are not the best answer to protecting the community against sex offenders.

Mayor Roger Bang said restricting access may be more important than residency.

“We need to restrict where the worst of the worst can go and congregate,” he said. “It is appropriate that government do something.”

Mason City does not have a sex offender restriction ordinance, but Bang said he wants to assure residents that the matter is being carefully studied.

“We are really taking it seriously,” he said. “We want to protect our most vulnerable citizens, our children.”

Bang said he has attended meetings with the police chief, Cerro Gordo County sheriff, county attorney and assistant county attorney, and Department of Corrections officials to determine the best course of action.

“It’s up to the council, of course, but I’m concerned that we may need to go further than the state and some cities have gone,” Bang said. “We need to look at loitering laws and curfews and ways to restrict access. We need to, in effect, create ‘no pedophile zones.’ I know there are constitutional issues involved, and we need to smoke those out.”

The mayor said he also has concerns about categorizing sex offenders.

“There is a difference between a person who moons a school principal and someone who is a pedophile,” he said.

Councilman Scott Tornquist said he favors adding public swimming pools to the restricted list, but said more needs to be done.

“I am concerned additional restrictions will simply relocate problems rather than eliminate them,” he said. “While I am concerned about further encumbering individuals that have served their time, as a father of two young boys, I am also keenly aware of the need to protect our youth.

“I believe we need loitering restrictions on convicted offenders that can be enforced by local law enforcement. Residency restrictions don’t stop loitering, and loitering is the problem,” Tornquist said.

Councilman Jeffrey Marsters said he has no problem looking at restrictive ordinances but cautions against trampling on anyone's constitutional rights.

"The issue is much greater than passing a simple ordinance and only focusing on sex crimes," he said. "Many other crimes are committed (like drug crimes, theft and violence) that citizens need protection from. We don't have the right to create ordinances restricting these people, and I question the constitutionality of laws that have completely banned sex offenders from living in their communities.

"Yes, we have to protect citizens. However, we have to carefully respecting the rights of everyone," Marsters said.

Councilman Don Nelson said, "It isn't like citizens' concerns are not being addressed by our elected officials. Iowa legislators have taken 13 steps since 1998 to combat sex crimes when children are victims and five new ideas are being raised in this year's legislative session."

Nelson said all the small- town residency prohibitions might prompt sex offenders to come to the larger cities. He wants the City Council to proceed cautiously, taking advice from law enforcement officials as to what will really work.

"Unfortunately, whatever our legislators finally pass will not protect our children 100 percent," Nelson said. "Studies indicate 80 percent or more of child sexual abuse victims are molested by relatives, family, friends or others known to the victim.

"I have confidence in our local law enforcement agencies to provide the City Council and concerned citizens with guidance and direction."

Councilman John Jaszew-ski said he believes the key is to crack down on loitering rather than on residency laws.

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