

Family wants expanded sex offender rules

By *BOB LINK, Of The Globe Gazette*

MASON CITY — When Tom and Tonya Kantaris' 12-year-old son said he felt awkward about a man who stood close to him at a school bus stop last month, they became concerned.

When the same man turned up at the bus stop again this week, they took the issue to City Hall.

They're asking city officials to consider an expanded sex offender ordinance.

The Kantaris' son mentioned the first incident to school officials on the day it happened. The school reported it to the Mason City Police Department. Officers kept a close watch on the bus stop, at Sixth Street Southwest and South Van Buren Avenue.

The man, who is listed on the state sex offender registry, wasn't observed there soon afterward, according to Mr. and Mrs. Kantaris.

But on Monday, Tonya Kantaris saw the man back at the school bus stop, which is across the street from a Mason City Public Transit bus stop.

Tonya Kantaris said the man stood at the corner for nearly an hour before getting on a city bus. "I understand he has a right to be there. But it was cold and a winter day; nobody waits 58 minutes unless they have another agenda."

She said the man stood on two corners of the intersection during that time. According to the transit system's Web site, city buses go by every 30 minutes. She said the man did board a bus after the long wait.

As parents, Tom and Tonya have done their homework. They have identified the man, know where he lives and have kept a close eye on their three children, ages 9 through 12.

They have followed closely the law restricting sex offenders from living within 2,000 feet of schools and licensed day cares.

The Kantaris home is outside a restricted area. They have learned that they have eight registered sex offenders living in their neighborhood.

The Kantarises and others approached the City Council on Tuesday night, asking for consideration of an expanded ordinance covering sex offenders.

They'd like parks, bus stops, libraries and the aquatic center to be considered as restricted areas.

"I don't think it's a knee-jerk reaction," Tom Kantaris said. "The sex offenders have a right to improve their lives after they've done their time. But everybody's kids are important. And we'll do whatever we have to do to protect our kids."

The couple is prepared to circulate a petition if needed.

"The police were great when they were contacted," Tonya Kantaris said. "And when they were around, the man wasn't. But there are a lot of bus stops and children in town."

Attempts by the Globe Gazette to contact the man seen at the bus stop were unsuccessful.

Mason City Police Chief David Ellingson is aware of the Kantaris' concern and said the department gets numerous calls about sex offenders.

"According to the maps, a large portion of town is covered by the state law," Ellingson said. "But there are areas" not covered, he said.

Ellingson said police chiefs across the state are talking about enforcement of sex offender laws. "I think there are a number of additional ideas surfacing that are worth looking at," he said.

One idea is to pass a law against sex offenders loitering where children reasonably gather or play.

"The idea would be to limit the behavior of the people who go in an area where they don't need to be," Ellingson said. "Why not take a look at regulations that keep them away from kids?"

Interim Mason City Administrator Pat McGarvey said this week that the council could have a discussion about the situation in January.

"We're working with the Police Department, looking at some different ideas, which we'll likely put together for the council to take a look at," McGarvey said.

Several North Iowa communities have established restrictions beyond the state law prohibiting where convicted sex offenders can live.

Reach Bob Link at 421-0538 or bob.link@globegazette.com.