

The Common Council held a public hearing regarding sex offender residency regulations at City Hall in the City of Black River Falls on May 6, 2025 at 6:30 P.M. Alderpersons Ammann, Peloquin, Dougherty, Busse, Gearing-Lancaster, and Wussow were present. Alderperson M. Rave was absent. Alderperson E. Rave was excused. Mayor J. Eddy presided.

---

Mayor Eddy opened the public hearing, thanked those present for attending and explained that the Council has met two times in public meetings to discuss bringing a sex offender residency ordinance in to place. The first meeting was informational, and the Council decided to meet again to gather more information. The City attorney attended second meeting for question and answer and explanation of statutes and the Council reviewed existing ordinances that had been drafted for other municipalities in the State. From there, the Council wanted public input and scheduled this public hearing. The Mayor asked those in attendance to raise their hand to be given the floor and explained there would be no questions and this would not be a discussion or debate and that the Council was looking for people to express their feelings on this issue and the possibility of an ordinance being drafted regarding it. The Mayor set a limit of 5 minutes for those wishing to address the Council.

---

Jeremy Justice, 650 Elm Street, addressed the Council. He stated he attended to see what was being discussed, something needs to be done, and he needs to know how he can protect his daughters. Knowledge is power and not necessarily looking to persecute people, but it would be helpful knowing what possible measures to be taken to protect his children. He believes the Council would find most men or head of households would feel the same.

---

Brady Palmer addressed the Council. He was under the impression the city attorney and the Police Chief would be attending this meeting. He thinks something needs to be done based on what he sees of free run of sex offender violators and also those that have committed offenses and are not reporting their whereabouts and also have numerous weapons, assault, and drug charges being allowed to roam around the schools which is scary. However, it should be a referendum to give it some credence and some teeth otherwise probably just another ordinance that does not get enforced.

---

Dominic Goviera addressed the Council. He stated he is not here as a community health worker but that is his career, and his clientele are our homeless population within the county and city. He does not believe an ordinance is going to solve any issue we have here. He explained the case of Jonathan Julian a convicted sex offender that moved here from New York City in 2018 or 2019 he worked in our community and went unregistered until Dominic turned him to U.S. Marshals. Now Julian is registered as homeless within our county, which is terrifying. This ordinance is not going to solve that issue. We have a registry that tells parents the people to look out for, to educate children how to handle people like this and addresses to maybe avoid if you can. He fears if we enact this ordinance we are going to create a massive population of homeless sex offenders that will not be tracked by anyone and will have free reign in this county. We can say we have an ordinance that does not allow them in certain areas, but who is going to enforce that? If they are homeless, we don't know where they are. That falls on him in his career to track people down and offer them resources, but again we are not solving any problems by doing this and this is the wrong step to take. If there is another option he is open to it. He is not pro sex offender and looks down upon sex offenders, but it terrifies him to think of a population of homeless, untrackable sex offenders in our area.

---

Tom Cooper, Town of Adams, addressed the Council. He stated he was a former employee of the City of Black River Falls in the Police Department. This is not the first time that this issue of a sex offender ordinance has come up. The Police Department had done some initial drafts and some mapping on this issue before and the biggest problem you have with a sex offender ordinance in the city is your radius in creating exclusion zones. The City cannot ban sex offenders from the entire City, it is unconstitutional. Where we were having the problem was with the TLP house at the top of the bridge. Because other communities had sex offender ordinances, the WI Dept. of Corrections were placing people in the TLP house at the top of the bridge that were known sex offenders from other areas but could not be returned to a specified location due to ordinance or statutory restrictions so the City was quickly becoming a dumping ground for the Dept of Corrections. Looked at the current draft of the map with the 1500-foot radius and with the Foundation Trail meeting the statutory definition of a City park applying that radius to the trail alone eliminates about 80% of the City. When you add in schools and all the other spaces noted in state statutes you quickly eliminate everything except a small area up by Hart Tie & Lumber. At that time we were only using a 1,000-foot radius. You will have to meet constitutional muster if you move forward and have to reduce your 1,500-foot radius down to a more compliant district. In regards to sex offenders in general, the WI Dept. of Corrections can set probation rules for those who have been convicted as an alternative to going to prison and placed on probation or as they are coming out of prison on parole and they can be enforced by the probation and parole agents. If you have someone that meets sex

offender lifelong registrant, then they fall under the sex offender registry program with the state. If you are a life registrant sex offender, under state law you must report to SORT (Sex Offender Registry Tool) and keep your address up to date and being non-compliant, or homeless, under the SORT rules would cause you to be taken in to custody for non-compliance with sex offender registration so homelessness is not our issue. Being a dumping ground for everyone else is. If we don't have anything here to protect our residents from sex offenders being dumped in our community we are wide open. We have a number of violent sex offenders that were at the TLP house that decided that Black River Falls was a nice community and stayed. It's difficult for convicted sex offenders to find employment so they resort to property crimes to survive, they sell stolen property to support old habits with drug addiction issues. Mr. Cooper stated he is not a resident of Black River Falls, but he would strongly encourage the Council to protect the citizens of the Black River Falls area in not being a dumping ground for other DOC issues or other places by passing some version of a sex offender residency ordinance. He thinks it is important the Council take a stand on that. There is a reason why there are 150 communities in the state of Wisconsin that have sex offender ordinances, and we don't want to be harboring those individuals. The ones that we have that commit sex offenses here in our jurisdiction, an ordinance would not be able to restrict them from returning to their residence after serving their sentence.

---

Melissa Barclay, Department of Corrections (DOC) Probation & Parole, addressed the Council. She advised they do not have the TLP in Black River any more, it is closed, they do not contract it, and that property is privately owned and he rents it out to whoever he chooses to. Sex offender residency restrictions make it very difficult for people who are trying to reintegrate in to the community. When the TLP was here there were a few out of county sex offenders that may or may not have stayed, but people also transfer here to live with their grandma or their aunt or whoever else is already living in the City. We are not holding up a sign that says come to Black River. We do our due diligence when we get a request for somebody to live within Jackson County and the City. We look at where the parks are, where it is in the city, is it right on the Foundation Trail. We get a lot of requests for homes in the Grove area and those are turned down because of the parks, the access to the Foundation Trail, and how close the Library is. There are a lot of places we turn down or if they do not have a legitimate plan when they come here or don't have a legitimate connection to the City resident, even if it is geographically appropriate. She has seen, from cases she has worked in Buffalo County where the City of Mondovi has a residency restriction ordinance, where an individual commits a sex offense, goes to prison, and comes back to the same residence because most residency restrictions allow that, but what happens is the person who lived out in the country but can no longer be there for whatever reason, they cannot find housing in the County, there aren't rentals out where they lost their farm etc., so they congregate in the City of Mondovi and they are homeless. If they are not supervised by the DOC and they are homeless that makes it very difficult because the DOC puts them on GPS so we know where they are, but once they discharge from supervision they are no longer on GPS they are just a homeless registrant that cannot find a house and they're out there under the bridge or unfortunately at the Deer Park. We all need to do the best we can for our community, and she understands that and that is why she comes to work every day to try to prevent further victimization and taking deep consideration to the residences they do approve. Statistically speaking, it is not the stranger on the street grabbing your kid, it is someone who is already in the house that is going to sexually assault them, so residency restrictions do not prevent that.

---

Reid Wurtzel, WI DOC Sex Offender Registration Program, addressed the Council. He acknowledged and thanked those in attendance for taking the time to discuss this issue. With active supervision, registrants can be put on GPS when they are homeless. He is involved with that process, but a majority of his work revolves around those that are no longer on any kind of supervision in the state, and when someone does not have a place identified where they can stay and some stability in their lives it presents issues. When we get homeless individuals the requirement is no longer that we send a letter to them for them to return because we do not have a place to send the letter to, it changes to them having to contact the DOC weekly and provide the following 7 days whereabouts or their planned whereabouts. Some people that are homeless simply do not know 7 days in advance where they're going to be as their situation changes that much and others, like in the City of La Crosse where his main office is, are constantly being told to move so sometimes it has them contacting him every 90 days with change of location. If he needs to verify where they are, it involves law enforcement being asked to go and locate those individuals on a 90-day basis or more frequently if they have no stability at all. It's a burden on law enforcement to have to go and track these people down, and we have found that having stability typically results in individuals doing better on supervision of course, but then also in compliance with registry. He saw some numbers that were put out there in regard to this meeting coming up tonight as far as the number of registrants. He laid out some numbers but cautioned that these numbers do fluctuate and do not stay the same all the time as some individuals that expire from the sex offender registry after 15 years, we have 10 registrants who have and are no longer on the registry, and of course we are adding new people as they are convicted and are required to register and many other things can factor in to how many people are on the registry change. In

Jackson County, as of today there are a total of 82 registrants that are not incarcerated. Of the 82, there is currently 1 that is non-compliant which is an indication what we are currently doing is pretty effective in trying to get as much compliance as possible. That doesn't mean there aren't some people who are being misleading or are mis-informing the registry but all we have to go off is what we have. As Melissa alluded to, she deals with the active individuals that are on supervision and that number was 27 compared to 55 that are inactive and no longer on any kind of supervision and those are people that we also have to keep tracking and keep that information. We need to work with law enforcement if that person does not have a home where a letter can be sent to verify that is where they are. If they have a home, we can set up random residential verification checks with the U.S. Marshals Service and the federal government or with local law enforcement agencies. If they don't, they simply call and tell him "I am going to be at Wal-Mart on the east side of town" and it is very difficult to know if that is in fact where they are. If we create a residency restriction that prohibits them from being in a majority of the city, there are certainly limitations to where you can prohibit people from being. You have to allow for some places for people to be, but if more people have to be homeless, then they be staying in the vehicle on the streets and it is undesirable in some ways. Some community members sometimes get lost in if we prohibit them from being here they won't be here, but we know that is not the case. People who grew up in a community, their family and friends are from the community, they may stop telling DOC that they are here to avoid issues with the ordinance, but naturally they're going to find ways to be around the community because that is all they know for some of them so they tend to go more under the radar, and I ask is that really accomplishing our goals? DOC does not make recommendations, and he just wanted to be here to provide some other information. He had a whole list of other unintended consequences that he wasn't able to get to unfortunately, but he would welcome the opportunity, if the Council finds it appropriate, to come back up to speak to the group or provide a presentation and we can get more in to all the unintended consequences that residency restrictions can result in.

---

Duane Waldera, Jackson County Sheriff, addressed the Council. He stated this is a home rule issue and definitely falls within the City's jurisdiction to make an ordinance. As it relates to the County Sheriff's office, it would be an enforceable issue for the City PD and the Sheriff's Dept. would understand there is a rule and if situation occurs it would be a referral unless there was some kind of a link or contract so you understand how it links to County government or county law enforcement and those are the ties to those issues. The Sheriff's office has a sex offender registration process and community notification policy that they work directly with the WI DOC as a person is being re-entered in to the community if they are a sex offender. The Sheriff's office has core meetings that are set up through the DOC so when a person is being released that does happen. During that process, there are 3 levels of notification to the community that is decided within the core team with a lot of discussion on if it is a sex offender or violent sex offender, what they have done, if they went through programming and everything that links with that, and then ultimately it comes down to the fact if we agree or not agree with that person's return the way it is presented or if there are modifications somehow through the placement of that individual. Back when they had the placement at the top of the bridge, there can be pros and cons. It's important to understand it is nice to know where sex offenders are and where they reside as an investigator and knowing is always important. There is a discussion point of not knowing and if they are under supervision and enter the community then they are under either GPS or requirement to report every 7 days and there is a lot of hope they follow through with that. Their position in law enforcement is law enforcement wants to make sure the offenders are compliant so if they are in our community law enforcement would like to know where the offenders are at and he is very modern on the restriction zones because he knows we are required to take them back in to their home counties from their convictions which puts pressure on the county and the City residency in trying to figure out what that might be and then they are ultimately are released off of supervision and that is another discussion point. There are pros and cons to the restrictions, and he knows it is very difficult to find placement for re-entering sex offenders. The one comment he made recently is that you need to understand your population and what is going on in your community. Most of these people being released are your population, these are people from your community either going back to the house they grew up in or something like that. If the City does a restriction zone he gets it, it just means those persons are going to be homeless or pushed out to other townships and then figure it out from there. Each township could do the same thing and we just restriction zone everything and what you'll find is whatever you choose the Sheriff's Dept. will do our best to know where that person is and know what restrictions are in place and then work with our professional partners in that arena to take care of that. This is not uncommon, what the City is going through and trying to find a residency plan that works best for the City. If the Council has any questions they can call the Sheriff's office, and this is more relative to the City Police Department and what they would want to do in this situation. He thinks there is this fear, first and foremost you have to have a safe community, but most of the cases he has worked it is usually a crime of opportunity which is someone who lives either with or close to the victim. These individuals are not the vans driving around the community, although that does happen at times, but the sex offenders we see in our community are linked somehow to the families or the victim in a way that,

those are the issues on why they had that opportunity. As to what to do next, it is up to the community and the person's parenting those children. Education and early intervention are very important to understanding criminal thinking that is another category.

---

The Mayor offered closing statements that included an explanation that this issue will continue to be on agendas until it is resolved one way or another as far as an ordinance. If an ordinance is drafted, it will be presented two different times at regular Common Council meetings so the public will have an opportunity to see everything prior to approval if it gets that far. We are not in a hurry to make this. We're trying to gather all the information we can and come up with what we feel is the best solution for our community.

---

The City Administrator advised the notice for the public hearing stated written comments could be submitted in advance of the hearing and three communications were received and were read in to the record.

---

Email received from Debbie Lakowske that read: Please add my name to the list of residents that are requesting restrictions on sex offenders living in the city. Please don't wait for it to get personal before taking action. It's embarrassing to be a resident of Black River Falls anymore. The city has really gone downhill and seems to be getting trashier by the week. Please take notice of the number of people speaking up. If the negligence continues, the city will only draw in more of the offenders. Word is getting out. Will anyone want to relocate here? Will the locals stay when no one is paying attention to how bad things are getting? Please take this issue seriously and do what is best for our community.

---

Email received from Beth Bue that read: To whom it may concern: I am unable to attend the meeting tonight about keeping our kiddos safe in our community, however would like to share my concerns. I own an in home childcare center and several registered sex offenders live within blocks of me. That is a concern, several times I have seen them walk by my center wondering if they have changed or "checking out" the area. In my opinion parks, schools, in home childcare centers, group childcare centers should NOT have sex offenders within so many blocks. I no longer take walks or go to the parks alone with the kiddos unsure if their safety. I hope my voice will be heard.

---

Email received from Tyson Clark that read: Hi, Sorry I couldn't attend — I'll keep this short. I started BRF Arcade after the movie theater closed, because kids in our town had nowhere safe to go. I made admission a day pass so I could keep it that way — supervised, kid-friendly, and secure. Here's the point: If the arcade allowed anyone inside — including convicted sex offenders — would you let your child, niece, nephew, or grandchild go there alone? It's not a rhetorical question. Roughly 1 in 4 sex offenders reoffend within 15 years — and we don't know which ones until it's too late. Their victims are overwhelmingly women and children. If the choice is between protecting kids or preserving the freedoms of convicted sex offenders, the answer is obvious: They can live in some other town that places the freedoms of sex offenders above the importance of consent for women, and the sexual innocence of children. If you oppose legislation meant to safeguard women and children from known predators, just know this — local outlets like the *Jackson County Pulse* will make sure those actions don't go unnoticed. We will all know. This is an easy line to draw. Protect the innocent — not those who've already made their choice.

---

It was moved by Alderperson Wussow, seconded by Alderperson Peloquin to close the public hearing. Motion carried.

---

It was moved by Alderperson Peloquin, seconded by Alderperson Gearing-Lancaster to adjourn. Motion carried at 7:08pm.

---

A. Brad Chown, City Administrator