

Sex offender overload

Written by Harry Colbert, Jr.
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Concerned residents of neighborhoods in north Minneapolis are calling on state, county and city officials to address the concentration of registered sex offenders in the community.

As of July 2, there were 130 registered level 3 sex offenders residing in Minneapolis. Of that, 63 lived in north Minneapolis zip codes of 55405, 55411 and 55412. The heaviest concentration of level 3 offenders – 35 – dwelled in the 55411 zip code. In contrast, during the same time there was only one level 3 sex offender residing in the more affluent 55419 zip code of south Minneapolis. As of July 2, there were 32 registered level 3 sex offenders residing in all of St. Paul.

Level 3 sex offenders are those considered most likely to re-offend.

A community meeting held at the North Regional Library, 1315 Lowry Ave. N., presented by the Jordan Area Community Council, allowed residents to hear from state, county and city officials on what can be done to deconcentrate the number of sex offenders in the area.

“Would you have this high number (of sex offenders) in Edina, Eden Prairie – near Lake Calhoun,” questioned Jordan neighborhood resident, David Haddy. “I demand answers, we demand answers. Enough is enough.”

According to state Department of Corrections (DOC) officials, once a level 3 sex offender is released from prison, that offender must report to a halfway house for a period of 60 days and many of the halfway houses are located in north Minneapolis, which could explain the proliferation of offenders in the area. Officials also said many sex offenders find refuge with property owners who are willing to rent to them, and some of these owners own multiple properties in north Minneapolis.

Haddy, who is white, said he believes the heavy concentration of sex offenders in north Minneapolis neighborhoods is a deliberate state and city plan to house dangerous sex offenders in largely African-American areas.

“This is an act of purpose to concentrate these level 3 (sex offenders) in lower income, minority

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populations,” said Haddy, who said though many offenders committed their initial crimes in other areas – and even counties far from Hennepin County – the offenders tend to end up in a dense area of north Minneapolis.

According to Haddy, five level 3 sex offenders live on one single block and six additional offenders on Golden Valley Road share the same apartment building.

“We know the (state) statute has gaping holes,” said State Senator Bobby Joe Champion. “We have to recommit ourselves in the legislature to change the statute.”

Champion said in addition to beefing up the language in the state statute as to where sex offenders can reside and what is considered “concentration,” the city needs to examine an ordinance on the matter.

Hennepin County Councilwoman Linda Higgins laid blame squarely at the feet of the state DOC.

“The state Department of Corrections says they have nothing to do about this concentration, but they’re wrong; dead wrong,” said Higgins, who said the department needs to change its policy on where released offenders can reside. According to Higgins, once released, level 3 offenders have to demonstrate what she termed as weak ties to an area in order to have their civilian living approved.

Ward 5 City Councilman Don Samuels, who was on hand for the beginning of the meeting, said the state’s law concerning the placement of released sex offenders does not do enough to protect the residents of north Minneapolis and said the city needs to draft an ordinance to limit the places where sex offenders can reside.

“Quite frankly, it’s an outrage for the city to have such a high concentration of sex offenders in one area where half the population is under the age of 18 years of age,” said Samuels, who is vying to become the city’s next mayor.

A complete list of registered level 3 sex offenders can be found on the Minnesota DOC website at www.doc.state.mn.us/level3/search.asp .