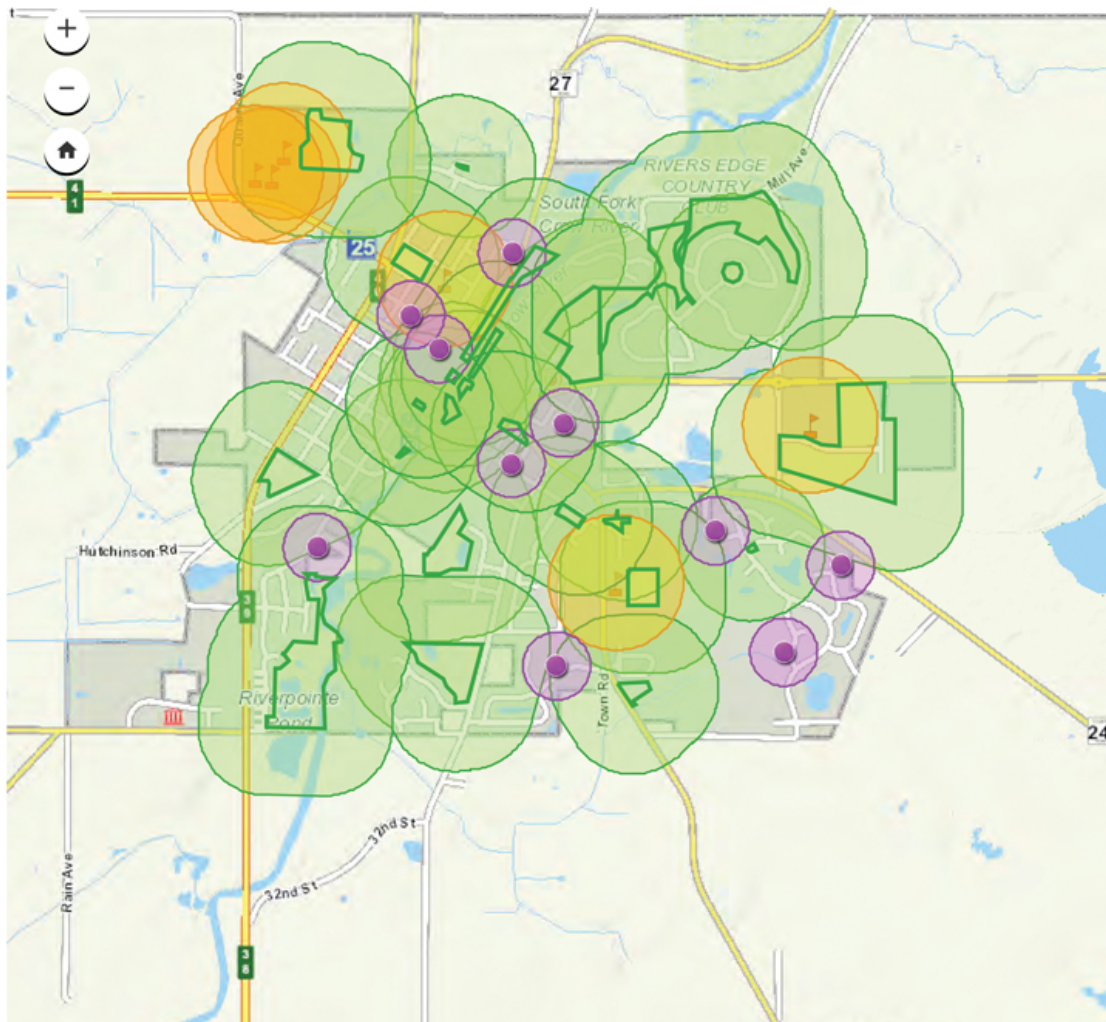


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# Watertown first in county to tighten restrictions on level 3 sex offenders

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By mpriebe



A map from Watertown City Council documents shows the new boundaries that will be enforced for level 3 sex offenders seeking to move to Watertown. Schools are denoted in orange, parks in green and licensed daycare providers in purple.

By Melissa Priebe

watertown.editor@ecm-inc.com

After months of debate, the City of Watertown became the first city in Carver County to adopt strict residency restrictions for predatory sex offenders, extending the boundaries around areas where children are present.

“Watertown is setting the precedence for Carver County,” said Deborah Everson, city council member. “We will be only city in Carver County that will have this.”

The Watertown City Council voted to adopt Ordinance 397, amending Chapter 26 of the Watertown City Code to increase the distance for restricted areas from a boundary of 500 feet from schools and parks, as was stated in the existing law. The amendment prohibits level 3 sex offenders from living within 1,000 feet of a school or park and within 500 feet from a licensed daycare provider, creating very small pockets where level 3 sex offenders may live.

“We’re taking an initiative to protect our citizens and, specifically, the children from convicted predators,” said Michael Walters, city council member. “We’re talking about very dangerous felons that the Department of Corrections has identified as likely to reoffend.”

Walters said the measure serves as a “community values statement,” and over the course of the discussions, his opinion on the matter has only grown stronger.

According to city records, official discussions of the proposed amendment began in April, when the Watertown City Council first considered the amendment in a work session.

A proposed amendment was brought forward at the June 14 meeting, but members of the city council expressed that the prohibited areas were not large enough. The council considered several different options, including boundaries of 500 feet, 750 feet, 1,000 feet, and combinations giving schools and parks a different boundary than daycare providers. They tabled the vote, and turned to other city and county staff for insight on what kind of boundaries could be enforced.

Lieutenant Patrick Barry, representing the Carver County Sheriff’s Office, said the county would enforce whatever laws they put on the books. City Administrator Shane Fineran advised against implementing boundaries that would take all of Watertown off the map for released offenders. Then, City Attorney Jared Shepherd shared examples of what has been enacted in other Minnesota cities.

“There are a few communities, for example Wyoming, Minnesota, has a 2,000-foot buffer for schools, daycare, parks, 1,000 feet for bus stops and places of worship,” he said. “Taylors Falls: 2,000-foot for schools, daycares, parks and playgrounds, 1,000 feet for bus stops and places of worship,. Of course, it’s important to realize that each community is laid out differently, and those restrictions are a function of where the different buildings are.”

No level 3 sex offenders are registered in the city of Watertown, or the whole of Carver County, as reported to the Minnesota sex offender registry.

Even in neighboring counties, the numbers tend to be low. No level 3 sex offenders are registered in McLeod County or Sibley County. Only two are registered in Wright County, and three are registered in Scott County. In Wright County, the sex offenders are located in Maple Lake Township and Monticello, and in Scott County, they are located in Prior Lake, Belle Plain

and rural Jordan.

Numbers spike the Twin Cities metro area, with 139 level 3 sex offenders registered in Hennepin County alone, but the Carver County Sheriff's Office is notified any time a predatory sex offender is released into the area where they have jurisdiction. Authorities then provide notification to the community.

"We don't currently have any level 3 offenders living in Carver County," said Barry. "As far as violations go for offender registries, in the last five and half years, so as of today, we've had a total of 24 violations, 16 of those were charged."

Barry said the statistics, which go back to 2011, include some minor violations, such as an offender registering a day late or failing to notify the sheriff's office about a change in vehicle.

"We do go out and make contact with them up to twice a year," said Barry.

The Watertown City Council voted unanimously to amend the ordinance on Tuesday, July 28.

"Only 39 of the 805 cities in Minnesota have instituted this type of an ordinance," said Walters. "The cost of a predatory offender victimization to our society at large, it's not calculable because we don't know, but it's definitely steep. If you have somebody like this next to your parks or one of these guys next to your school, you're rolling the dice."

The new city ordinance is effective as of July 15, 2016.

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