

Joliet, IL update; plan for “pocket park” moves forward

written by Sandy | August 4, 2022



By Sandy . . . The Joliet, IL City Council met the evening of August 2. One of the agenda items was the purchase by the city of a property on N. Center Street, one block from the NewDay Apartments on Cora Street. This is the property that Joliet mayor Bob O’Dekirk has announced would be bought in order to erect enough equipment to have it classified as a playground in order to force from their home six men on the Illinois sex offender registry living at the apartments.

The item involving the Center Street property was called about thirty minutes into the meeting and was, not surprisingly, approved.

One council member asked if this would create a situation where the residents of the Cora Street apartments would have to leave, and after receiving an affirmative answer, he had the intelligence to ask specifically if a “grandfather” clause would be included and was told no.

A grandfather clause is designed to allow those already present in a newly-restricted area to remain there. Such clauses are standard practice in the erection of new exclusionary restrictions as it raises constitutional concerns, as well as being devoid of human compassion, to kick people already living somewhere out on the street. The councilman who asked the question apparently felt no such compassion or concern, as the vote to approve the purchase of the property was unanimous.

So what happens now?

The house on Center will need to be moved or demolished.

Landscaping will be needed to prepare the ground. Playground equipment will need to be purchased and installed and, one presumes, some sort of legal action completed in adding a children's playground to the city's properties of parks and playgrounds.

Will the men on Cora be mailed eviction notices? This is just one of many unknowns. A spokesman for the NewDay Apartments has said that the men there will be relocated to other properties and that men who are on the registry but not subject to the 500 foot exclusion zone law will be placed in the apartments. The mayor has indicated there are laws that will make the Cora Street building off-limits for all registrants.

Some other unknowns, but issues worth considering, are:

Will some of the current registrants on Cora end up joining the ranks of Illinois' homeless population?

The mayor says this is needed to protect children; virtually all sexually abused children are victims of persons not on a registry and not strangers in their lives but rather trusted family members, peers, and authority figures; how is this action protecting children?

Could the money spent on this action have been better spent on a program in the schools focusing on preventing child sexual abuse?

There are several other parks and playgrounds in the area; will this one be utilized by children at all? Does anyone care?

And finally, the clergyman who gave the invocation at the beginning of the meeting included among the petitions a prayer for protection for the city's residents; did he mean **all** the city's residents, including the residents living at 1000 Cora Street, or did he mean just **some** of the city's residents?