

Joliet mayor Bob O'Dekirk, please do the right thing

written by Sandy | August 2, 2022



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By Sandy . . . Much has been made recently of an apartment building in Joliet, Illinois, housing six individuals on the Illinois sex offense registry. Joliet's mayor Bob O'Dekirk has consistently supported attempts to have the men removed. He has been very vocal about this.

Frustrated by a federal ruling superseding the state law that allows only one registered person at any given address, Mayor O'Dekirk has now announced his intent to build what is known as a "pocket park" in order to have the registrants forced out. A state law requires registrants who were convicted of offenses against a child (defined by the statute as anyone under the age of eighteen) [to live more than 500 feet](#) from schools, playgrounds, and child-care facilities. The apartment building is in compliance, as, [according to their website](#), are all NewDay apartments.

According to his statement, the mayor is putting forth to city council at their August 2 meeting a proposal to purchase a home he has located within 500 feet of the apartments. The plan then, apparently, is to move or demolish the home and do what is necessary to declare the lot a children's playground, thereby putting the property off limits for anyone convicted as a child sex offender.

While everyone understands and agrees with the need and duty to protect children from harm, this will best be accomplished by actions grounded in empirical evidence and with truth and facts rather than hyperbole, fear-mongering, and falsehoods.

The mayor, in an interview posted on Facebook, repeatedly attacked the owners of the apartment building in question, attacking them for building it in Joliet, "on the other side of the state" from where they lived, rather than in their own area.

The headquarters of NewDay Apartments is in Lake Zurich in Lake County. NewDay owns a dozen properties in Lake, Kane, Will, and Winnebago counties. The properties are all approved by the Illinois Dept. of Corrections and in compliance with state laws.

The rules for their tenants are strict: only one non-violent (as defined by Illinois law) sexual offense is allowed; to be considered, applicants must have no other felonies, including drug offenses; applicants must pass extensive criminal and credit background checks.

As the rationale to support his position, Mayor O'Dekirk made loud claims that recidivism among those on the registry is "extremely high," one of the highest of all crimes.

Every aspect of that is false. Reoffense among registrants is very, very low, an [average of around 5% from all reporting states](#), and reoffense among those with a single, non-violent offense is extremely low. The most recent Illinois study

showed an across-the-board [reoffense rate of 2.4% after three years \(p.17\)](#). Many studies refer to sex offender reoffense as lower than every other category of crime other than murder.

The mayor is perpetuating the outdated and debunked “stranger danger” myth in taking this action. [The overwhelmingly greatest threat for sexual harm to children comes from those close to them](#): family members, peers, and trusted acquaintances and authority figures, not strangers who may or may not also be registered persons.

When asked, a spokesperson for NewDay Apartments said, “The city of Joliet’s position that the Cora St. property should be shut down will do nothing to protect the local community. If the city decides to build a ‘pocket park’ near Cora, NewDay will simply place registrants who are not subject to the 500’ restriction at the building. The city’s efforts will only result in the names of the registrants at Cora St. changing. NewDay will continue to protect communities by providing safe, affordable housing to registrants to help ensure they comply with all local laws and regulations. To date, not a single tenant at Cora St. has even been accused of a new crime, much less convicted of one.”

The bottom line is this: Illinois law has created a large [homeless population among registrants](#) due to residency restrictions. Providing housing for as many of these individuals as possible, aside from the positive benefits for the registrants, helps create safer neighborhoods.

Mayor O’Dekirk is in a position to be a positive influence in his community simply by telling his constituents the truth. Communities are safer when those who have taken responsibility for their actions, served or are serving their punishment, and wish to build a law-abiding life as a productive member of society have access to the means with which to begin that journey.

Everyone bears the responsibility of protecting our children and maximizing the resources we have. These goals can only be reached by building on a foundation of facts and truth.