

Editorial

Armed with information

The subject of sex offenders doesn't come up often in conversation, until the subject hits close to home.

Recently, state Rep. Lew Evangelidis met with a group of Holden residents who were concerned that a sex offender may be living in their neighborhood. In the aftermath of that meeting, he realized there exists a lack of understanding about how the sex offender laws, including the Sex Offender Registry, operate in Massachusetts.

To ensure that many of those questions are answered, Evangelidis is hosting a forum on Tuesday, Feb. 6 in Holden so people can gain the necessary expert information about a difficult subject.

Take the time to drive out there and learn about the law, the issues and how to protect yourself and your children.

Public outcry about sexual predators ebbs and flows with the headlines, and the recent recovery of two kidnapped boys in Missouri, one who had been abducted four years ago, has again heightened fears about offenders in our midst.

The Dateline NBC show "To Catch a Predator" continues to nab men who believe they are arriving at an apartment to meet an underage girl or boy for sex — a meeting they've arranged online — only to be arrested by police. Amazingly, several of the arrestees admit they've seen the show, yet the compulsion is so strong they still risk incarceration and national humiliation by showing up at the house.

As Evangelidis said in an interview, "How does the system work when the [offenders] by their own admission say they're incurable?"

Evangelidis has proposed two notable amendments to the sex offender laws that are meant to increase protections for citizens. One would mandate that Level Two offenders — whose crimes can include rape, assault and abuse of children — be posted online just as are Level Three offenders, who are considered the most likely to re-offend. As the law now reads, a resident can only obtain information on Level Two offenders through an application form filed with the local police or the Sex Offender Registry Board.

The second amendment would ensure that a sex offender who appeals the level of his or her classification, remains on the registry even while the appeal is heard. Currently, the offender is not included on the registry until the appeal is decided, which can take months.

Both proposed amendments are sure to ignite debate on Beacon Hill, and it's an essential discussion that may speak volumes about the level of protections the state is willing to offer its citizenry.

The forum about the Sex Offender Laws will be held February 6 at 7 p.m. in the Holden Senior Center. All residents from the area are invited. Speakers will be Robert Baker, Director of Operations for the Massachusetts Sex Offender Registry Board, and a representative from the Holden Police Department.

Letters to the Editor

Resident speaks out for budget control

To the Editor:

The town of Westminster is in the process of appointing a committee to investigate the benefits and social impact of retail business development in Westminster. As a former member of the IDC (Industrial Development Commission), I generally favor commercial development and broadening of the tax base. That being said, we also need to be realistic about the tax benefits relative to spending.

A couple of years ago, a school override passed, which costs the town of Westminster an additional \$900,000 or so per year. To put things in perspective, consider the potential Home Depot development example which was discussed last fall. Using the planning board figures, a Home Depot store would generate about \$70,000 per year in property tax revenue. Using the developer's figures, it would generate about \$250,000 per year in property tax revenue. If we had wanted to pay for that school override with revenue from commercial development, we would have had to build anywhere from four to thirteen Home Depot size stores just to cover the cost of that override. Now consider that all of that override money is gone already and the schools find themselves in financial difficulties once again. Would we build another four to thirteen buildings to cover the cost of the next override and do the same in three years again? We can make Rt. 2 look like a retail Disney Land and our local government will still outspend the revenues from it.

I support the notion that every dollar generated through commercial or industrial development is a dollar that doesn't have to come out of someone's family budget, but it is not the panacea for all of our financial challenges. There has to be a genuine commitment to budget reform in general and contract reform in particular if we ever plan to get a handle on the confiscatory costs of local government. Over the past ten years or so, our local government has increased spending at an annual rate of over 8% per year, while our family budgets have grown by less than half that rate. Although I believe in the benefits of commercial development, it is not going to be enough to substitute for responsible budgeting.

It is true that there are some costs which may be beyond government control but most of the costs are under local government control, labor costs in particular. Urge your local representatives and School Committee to bring their budgets under control. Insist on responsible budgets!

Keith Harding
Westminster

Arrrrrrrrrrh!



Jace Henrie and his mom, Robin, stuck with a Pirates of the Caribbean theme for the dance, which more than 100 boys and their moms attend.

JOURNAL PHOTO/M. KATE ROMANO

Letters to the Editor Policy

All letters should be no more than 500 words in length, and should include the writer's name, address and phone number.

We will not publish street address, e-mail address or phone number.

Please avoid handwritten letters if at all possible.

The editor reserves the right to reject letters or edit for clarity, brevity, good taste and accuracy, and to prevent libel. No poetry, attacks on private individuals, or letter-writing campaigns, please. Due to the volume of mail, writers are asked to limit submissions to one letter every 30 days.

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PO Box 67, Ashburnham, MA 01420
Thank you, we look forward to hearing from you.

COMMUNITY JOURNAL QUESTION OF THE WEEK

If your town had to cut their budget what would you like to be the first to go?

Hours that the town halls are open School supplies for the students
Town or school employees Nothing, I'd be willing to approve an override

Cast your vote online at www.thecommunityjournal.com

Results of last week's question:

What did you do during the power outage?

Used a battery operated computer - 0% Played board games - 50% Slept - 50%

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