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W-B city council will hold meeting on sex offender ordinance

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WILKES-BARRE — City council will hold a special meeting Dec. 20 to vote on an ordinance prohibiting sex offenders from living in 90 percent of Wilkes-Barre.

Councilman Jim McCarthy, who proposed the ordinance, presented a map identifying all schools, parks, playgrounds, recreational areas and child-care facilities in the city. Sex offenders will be prohibited from living within 1,500 feet of these locations.

“This ordinance is designed to protect those who are most vulnerable and least protected,” McCarthy said.

The ordinance leaves 10 percent of the city where sex offenders can live in scattered locations, including about seven blocks off North Main Street in North End, parts of South Main and South Franklin streets and small areas in the city’s Heights and Iron Triangle sections.

McCarthy asked council members to vote on the ordinance on Thursday. Council members said they support the ordinance, but postponed the vote since the Charles Street Park and a Gordon Avenue park were not yet included in the map.

“We all feel it is very important legislation to protect our children,” said Councilman Phil Latinski. “We are interested in making it as foolproof as possible.”

Wilkes-Barre resident Sam Troy urged council to reconsider the ordinance.

“I would hate to live in that 10 percent of the city. I hope it’s not in the Heights where I live,” Troy said. “Maybe we should wait for a state law. From a logical standpoint, I don’t think this works. From a constitutional standpoint point, I don’t think it works.”

Assistant Solicitor Bill Vinsko said city council cannot eliminate people from moving into the city.

“If it grows large enough where the entire city is limited, then it becomes unconstitutional,” Vinsko said. “It has to be a reasonable restriction.”

Wilkes-Barre resident Mike Young told council members they ought to restrict the sale of pornography at mini-markets.

City resident Tim Grier, who took pictures of council members and videotaped the meeting, spoke out against the use of surveillance cameras, saying, “This is not Russia.” He said they don’t have the right to point cameras at private properties and complained they will not identify where all the locations are.

“He’s complaining about cameras that are used to deter crime in the City of Wilkes-Barre, yet sits in the back of the council chambers with a movie camera himself,” Councilman Mike McGinley told Grier, after

he was declared out of order. "Before that, he stands here and takes pictures of the council members to try to intimidate us. Well, I will not be intimidated...and you could tape that on camera yourself."