

# List of drug-free safe zones expanded

By **Michael Kelley** - May 31, 2018



WESTBROOK — A number of parks and recreational areas across the city have long been designated drug-free safe zones, but the City Council has added two more places to the list.

Acting on a recommendation from the Westbrook Police Department, councilors May 21 approved adding to the list the playgrounds at the end of the Clearwater Bend subdivision at 27 Reed St. and at former church property near 2 Walker St. In a letter to city councilors, Westbrook Police Capt. Steven Goldberg said those two locations are “heavily used for recreation and other community events.”

“By adding these two locations to the list of drug-free zones, it gives the police department another tool to use in combating drug trafficking and making the city safer. Anyone caught trafficking or furnishing drugs within 1,000 feet of these new drug free zones would face enhanced penalties for their offenses,” Goldberg said, adding “inclusion of these two new zones would enhance this and assist in any drug trafficking investigations in those respective neighborhoods.”

Goldberg told the American Journal trafficking and furnishing drugs in a drug-free zone “bumps the criminal offense up a class. So if you normally would be charged with a Class B felony, you would now be charged with a Class A felony. A Class A felony can lead to a longer sentence.”

The enhanced penalties don't apply to possession, he said.

The Walker Street property is owned by Avesta Housing, where it operates Hyacinth Place, a converted church building, and Steeple Square, a collection of apartment buildings between Walker, Webb, Dodge and Pike streets.

“We support it as being drug free. There is a significant amount of children who reside in the neighborhood around Webb and Walker,” said Hollie Sprague, director of property operations for Avesta Housing. “Knowing it is drug-free helps us promote it that much more.”

Sprague said she knows of no instances of drug deals in the park, but Avesta wanted to be proactive.

Cullen Ryan, executive director of Community Housing of Maine, which designed, built and operates the 23-unit Clearwater Bend neighborhood, said he is thrilled the property, which used to be a small horse pasture, has been designated a drug-free safe zone.

“It allows the community to put additional resources to help make sure kids playing there are safe and if there are individuals active and involved with drugs, it allows authorities to have some extra tools at their disposal to ameliorate that,” Ryan said. “We want to have a safe place for people to live where community support can come in and help make sure folks who have substance use disorder have the support they need to get well, but also be accountable for things they are doing that affect other community members.

Other drug-free safe zones in the city include ball fields on Foster Street and Stevens Avenue; the ball field/skate rink on Bridge Street; the basketball courts and playgrounds at the Hamlet and Westbrook Pointe; Bicentennial Park on Hannaford Drive; Riverbank Park on Main Street; Saccarappa Park on Main Street; the Cornelia Warren Field Complex (fields, pool, basketball courts) on Main Street; the skate rinks on Stroudwater and Lincoln streets; Walker Memorial Library on Main Street, as well as Warren Memorial Little League Field and Westbrook Community Center on Bridge Street. Westbrook's five schools are also drug-free zones.

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The playground near a neighborhood managed by Avesta Housing at 2 Walker St. is one of the two additional locations the City Council has designated a drug-free zone.

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