

# CENTRAL ILLINOIS

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## Taylorville council offers alternatives to curfew law

Downtown businesses have been vandalized for years.

**By ANTHONY BUNCH**  
Herald & Review Bureau Chief

TAYLORVILLE — City leaders appear poised to get tough on the youths in Taylorville, but a proposed curfew for downtown seems to have enough support to pass the city council's ordinance committee Tuesday.

Instead, the committee voted against drafting a curfew law and agreed to explore alternatives — like writing laws to keep the kids who are causing trouble off the sidewalks and to limit the sizes of crowds.

"This is a big bear to wrestle," Alderman Ernie Dorchins, chairman of the committee, said. "That (the square) is kind of a ... safe place. They will go someplace else if they can't find a place?"

Taylorville Mayor Jim Montgomery Jr. and police Chief Greg Brotherton proposed a curfew that would permit only to the square to the limit of the size of each crowd. They have long believed that adults are causing many of the downtown problems — up to 100 broken glass bottles on business windows and doors.

"Most of the problems we have down there seem to be from older people," Brotherton said. "I think if after 10 p.m. you eliminate them and adults, they won't have a reason to perform."

He admitted that the law would be a difficult one for Rocci Romano, the city's attorney, to write.

"The curfew law has been challenged several times," Brotherton said. "It's been a long time, and we may not be able to put it into court and challenge it."

Identified as the police chief would like to eliminate all littering on the square because of the vandalism downtown business owners received.

"Initially what I was looking at is something to help our merchants downtown. They've been complaining about it," Brotherton said. "I don't care if they're 50 years old, if they're up there (on the square) for fun and they have a purpose, I'd like to move them on."

Montgomery supported the curfew proposal, but if there wasn't enough support for it, he would be in favor of stricter enforcement of existing ordinances if possible new, less drastic ones.

Another group of juveniles, however, will likely be facing a tougher law later this week.

The committee voted 3-1 to ask Romano to write an ordinance making it illegal for juveniles to possess tobacco products.

"I just can't imagine not having it," Brotherton said. "The idea is that they're not for the kids, and you can't tell it to them, why wouldn't you have (the law)?"

Alfred Frank Mathon, the dissenting vote, proposed sending a resolution to state lawmakers asking them to rewrite the state law so that it would not reward minors and alcohol, which is illegal for people under 21 to buy or possess. Under state law, tobacco is illegal for minors to buy but not illegal for them to possess.

"I think tobacco should be banned right back up to the state ... using the same rationale as alcohol," Mathon said. "They're dumping that onto us."

Chicago lawmaker says alternative programs should be a requirement before expulsion.

**By JOHN C. PATTERSON**  
Herald & Review Bureau Writer

SPRINGFIELD — The fall session of the legislature had barely begun Tuesday when a state senator from Chicago, who also happens to be running for Congress, sent out news releases calling for changes to the expulsion laws in the wake of the ongoing controversy in Decatur.

State Sen. Barack Obama, D-Chicago, said state law should require students be enrolled in alternative education programs before they are expelled. Current law allows school districts to send troubled students to alternative programs, but does not force them to.

"My attitude is that to the extent that we're dealing with nonviolent offenders or students who haven't struck teachers or used weapons, that probably it's better to have them in school," Obama said. "I think that in fact these children attend alternative schools." Obama said in an interview.

One of the most difficult things we as a society have to decide is how we deal with young people who have engaged in serious wrongdoing. If we can do that in the end ... we can anticipate that over time a good number of these people will end up in the prison system," Obama said. "On the other hand, when we come to schools, we have to create a safe environment."

He said his goal is to provide guidance through the state laws.

Obama is running for the 1st Congressional District seat now held by U.S. Rep. Bobby L. Rush, D-Chicago. State Sen. Donne E. Trotter, D-Chicago, also is running for Trotter's seat. Rush has been in Decatur to speak with officials.

All three politicians are black and the district has a predominantly black population. Tuesday provided Obama an opportunity to speak with the community, although he denied that was his motivation.

"We got a long track record working on juvenile justice issues. I'm not a Johnny-come-lately. Certainly given the prominence the issue in Decatur has taken that it gives us an opportunity to speak with them about what we can improve in the system," Obama said.

His news release comes a day after another legislator urged colleagues not to grandstand during the fall session and to leave the Decatur situation in the hands of locally elected school officials.

State Rep. Mary Lou Cowlishaw, R-Naperville, said outsiders should respect the decisions made by the Decatur school board. Cowlishaw is a former school board member and the top Republican on the Illinois House Elementary and Secondary Education Committee.

"I have great respect for Jesse Jackson, he is a very articulate, very dedicated man," Cowlishaw said. "I would defend against all comers his right to go to Decatur and speak his mind. But the decision is not mine. The decision is that of the local school board. It is answerable to those taxpayers. He is not."

She recommended the school board, to

oversee departments such as streets, water and sewer.

Mayor Wanda Ferguson argued an administrator "would be good right now." She said an administrator would facilitate communication between department superintendents and commissioners.

"I've said it before," Ferguson noted. "People elected to do what I thought best. You can't put a price tag on the ballot."

Commissioners Bud Raboin and Ed Neal agreed. "We have been trying to save the city money," said Raboin, who added, "I added Neal. "The problem with an administrator is, there's no guarantee the council will let him run the (various) departments."

Neal and Raboin said what Mattoon needs most is a public works director to

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The council gave no indication whether the subject would come up again at its next meeting.

## Mattoon council undecided about city administrator position

One of the members who voted for the position changes his mind.

**By DEBBIE PIERCE**  
Herald & Review Bureau Chief

MATTOON — The Mattoon City Council on Tuesday again wrestled with whether it should change its form of government — and once again, came away with no decision.

The subject has been broached several times this year, but a proposed ordinance to change Mattoon from a commission-style of government to a mayor-council form of government was voted down.

Last month, the council voted 3-2 to have an ordinance drafted that would create a new position — that of city administrator — rather than going with a manager. Both positions would be filled by full-time professionals who would help the part-time council sort through the management of city business, however, a manager would have statutory responsibilities including hiring and firing that a manager would not. Changing to a manager form requires a majority vote of residents.

At its 3-2 voting, City Attorney John Neier drew up a tentative ordinance creating an administrator's position, the council determined it didn't have enough information to vote. Now, one of the commissioners who originally voted for the administrator has changed his mind.

Commissioner Gene Baker admitted he'd had "a terrible time" casting his vote for an administrator in the first place. Since then, he said, he's talked with numerous residents "who don't want a change."

He recommended the city let the media educate residents on the particulars of each option, then let voters decide if they change.

Commissioners Bud Raboin and Ed Neal agreed. "We have been trying to save the city money," said Raboin, who added, "I added Neal. "The problem with an administrator is, there's no guarantee the council will let him run the (various) departments."

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## Hundreds celebrate reading

More than 500 children attend storytelling program with their parents

**By VALERIE WELLS**  
Herald & Review

DECATUR — More than 500 children brought their parents to the Decatur Public Library on Tuesday for Celebrate Reading 2000.

"I can't think of a better way to spend an evening than reading with your child," said Cathy Fleming, circulation sales and marketing manager for the Herald & Review. The newspaper sponsored the event, along with Archer Daniels Midland Co., the Decatur Memorial Hospital and Illinois Power Co.

Parents and children thronged the upstairs children's section of the library to participate in stories read for the program, which included stories read by Bruce Hollibaugh, regional manager for Illinois Power, children's librarian Katie Gross, and children's author Maryann Morsman.

Hollibaugh's two selections, a book called "Caps for Sale" and a poem about "Sarah Cynthia Sylvia" were obviously familiar to the children who crowded into the reading room. As Hollibaugh read about Sarah's goat, she got the children to come up with colorful descriptions of items like "dried-up pizza crusts" and "curdled cottage cheese." The children enthusiastically shouted "Evening, we're back!" as she finished.

Gross said she was thrilled to see so many in attendance.

"I'm so glad to have them and spend the rest of the week, the month, the year, and read, read, read to your children," she told the audience.

Eve Cunningham, 7, has been reading on his own since he was 4, said his proud mother, Lashel Johnson.

"I'm amazed at the way he reads," she said, adding, "he's a natural." He reads everything, signs, mail, catalogues.

His favorite books are science fiction, she said. Johnson said he likes reading about "lots of things."

Johnson said she started Erie out with BabyTALK activities promoting reading and parent/child bonding.

"What a wonderful celebration of our library," Quigg said from her seat in the toddler area, where she was reading to the little ones. "It's just a gift. There are so many other things in our community that make you sad, but this library just makes you happy."

Parents and children participate in Pizza Hut's Book It program. For every so many minutes of reading, children earn certificates and prizes. This year, the program attended a Home and School Association meeting at St. Patrick School on Tuesday and heard about the Celebrate Reading program at the school.

"We buy books, we bring them to the library, and they bring home books from the library," Keyes said.

**STORY TIME:** Robin Keyes of Decatur brought her daughter, Anna, 4, to Celebrate Reading 2000 at the Decatur Public Library Tuesday evening.

## LIBRARY EVENT

**OVERVIEW:** The Herald & Review's Celebrate Reading 2000 event drew a large crowd to the Decatur Public Library Tuesday evening.



**TIME:** Robin Keyes of Decatur brought her daughter, Anna, 4, to Celebrate Reading 2000 at the Decatur Public Library Tuesday evening.



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## State senator calls for changes to school expulsion laws in wake of Decatur dispute

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to do exactly what it would have done if Jesse Jackson had never come to town."

Meanwhile, state Sen. N. Duane Noland, R-Bloomington, said the growth in enrollment with how the school situation has played out. Noland and state Reps. Bill Mitchell, R-Forsyth, and Julie A. Curran, R-Orono, released a statement Monday night supporting the school district's decision.

Noland said he is willing to consider any legislation that provides a "reasonable" but effective way to avoid "knee-jerk reactions to this issue."

He said Obama's recommendations sound reasonable, and he supports alternative education as a last chance for troubled students. But he defended the Decatur school board's actions, because only the board has the information necessary to make a decision.

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