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NEWS

In wake of killing and escapes, Madison revokes Three Springs business license

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Three Springs, also known as Sequel TSI, is located at 1329 Brownsferry Road in Madison. (Photo: AL.com news partner WHNT News 19)



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Two years after a Georgia man was fatally beaten and robbed in Madison, the City Council voted tonight to revoke the business license of the residential juvenile facility from which the accused killers escaped.

The council unanimously voted to revoke the business license of Sequel TSI, which is known locally as Three Springs. Mayor Paul Finley said the city's goal is to have Sequel out of town within seven days. The council vote immediately revoked Sequel's business license but allows a seven-day grace period.

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Sequel is a private, for-profit company that operates youth facilities in several states. It has five Alabama locations: in Madison, Courtland, Owens Cross Roads, Montgomery and Tuskegee. Representatives of the company didn't comment after the city council vote.

Before the council voted, Kenny Roberts, a senior vice president at Sequel, said the company wanted to work with the city to find solutions to community concerns about safety.



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“Everybody can win,” Roberts said. “We can do this without a fight.”

But in light of a recent escape and a history of security breaches at Sequel, City Councilor John Seifert said the time for working together had passed.

“You screwed up multiple times,” Seifert said. “You failed your residents.”

Sequel’s Madison location is a medium-risk secure facility for boys between the ages of 12-18. Some of the young residents have been convicted of juvenile crimes and are placed at Sequel by the Alabama Department of Youth Services. Others are placed by the Alabama Department of Human Resources for behavioral issues or problems at home. It’s not yet clear where the boys will be housed when Sequel leaves Madison. AL.com has contacted DHR and DYS for comment.

In Madison, a rapidly-growing suburb of Huntsville, Sequel came under fire after Van Johnson, a 61-year-old construction worker, was killed on the night of Aug. 14, 2017. Johnson was beaten and robbed as he worked at a construction site outside Publix on County Line Road. The store is about a mile from Sequel, which is located on Browns Ferry Road.

Jakobe Carter and Aaron Jones are charged with capital murder in the slaying. The morning of the killing, the two ran away from Sequel, according to the authorities.

Shortly after the killing, the city council considered revoking Sequel's business license. But, with a promise of a safety audit and improved security at the facility, the city in 2018 decided to give Sequel a second chance.

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In the two years since the killing, Sequel failed to fix lapses in security, city leaders said. The situation came to a head after three young people escaped last month. In the past year, residents have escaped from Sequel three times, said City Attorney Megan Zingarelli. Police Chief David Jernigan listed several incidents during which his officers have been called to search for Sequel escapees or investigate crimes at the facility, including when an employee was accused of having sexual contact with students in 2017.

Citing safety concerns, several residents asked the city council to revoke Sequel's business license at the specially called public hearing tonight. City leaders said they also got phone calls and emails from other citizens who wanted Sequel to leave town. Residents described seeing swarms of Madison police officers and the local SWAT team in their neighborhoods after three Sequel residents escaped for less than two hours on the night of July 25. Some residents said they carry guns to protect themselves and their families when Sequel residents escape.

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Other local leaders — including state Sen. Tom Butler, whose district includes Madison, and Madison County Commissioner Steve Haraway, who lives in Madison — also urged the city council to revoke Sequel's business license.

Mayor Finley said while he believes employees at the Madison location of Sequel care about the young people who reside there, the company's corporate leaders haven't worked with the city to improve safety and security.

"We don't feel safe with this facility in our community," Finley said.

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