

<http://www.startribune.com/stories/142/5724325.html>

Police want a full-time pawn officer, but it could cost shoppers

Fridley police want to combat fenced goods, but hiring a full-time officer would raise costs for the stores and possibly the customers.

Sarah McCann, Star Tribune

Last update: November 13, 2005 at 3:38 PM



[Printer friendly](#)



[E-mail this story](#)

The Fridley Police Department wants to tighten regulations on pawn shops, a plan Cash-N-Pawn and Pawn America find unneeded and unfair.

The city is set to add an officer who would be dedicated full time to pawn work. The job would be paid for through an increase in fees that pawn shops pay on every transaction.

Detective Sgt. Dave Prois said the two stores run good, clean businesses and cooperate with law enforcement. Nonetheless, "They're just costing more resources," he said. "Their business requires more regulation."

Research shows a link between property crimes and pawn shops, said Don Abbott, Fridley director of public safety. Property crimes are usually related to drugs, which can be related to other violence, he said.

Pawn shop owners said problems are being unfairly attributed to their stores.

"I think that's a misconception that somehow we have so much stolen property," said Alan Cross, chief financial officer of Cash-N-Pawn. "There's no basis to justify [an additional officer]."

Cross said he worries that the additional fees will hurt business and could be passed on to customers, some of whom are already hurting financially.

Pawn America owner Brad Rixmann said only three-tenths of 1 percent of all items his store handled last year were confiscated because they were stolen goods.

"We believe that's a woefully understated number," Abbott said, adding that more could be found if officers had more time.

"Every detective that has ever worked that detail or supervised that unit has absolutely or unequivocally told me that they could spend their full time every minute of their working day on pawn and the crime coming out of there," he said.

Last year 155 items were confiscated from Pawn America and 117 items from Cash-N-Pawn in Fridley.

Part of the way officers catch criminals is through a database called the Automated Pawn System (APS). Fridley and several other cities require pawn shops to use the software. When customers come in, they have to show photo identification, have their picture taken and sign a contract saying they are the rightful owner. Then employees record that information in the database along with a description of the item.

There is also a national database that records information on stolen goods across the country. If someone steals something and takes it to a pawn shop, it can be matched and the person can be identified.

Those requirements are enough, Cross said.

"Only a dumb criminal is going to bring something to the pawn shop," he said.

Cross said criminals could go to secondhand stores to avoid giving information.

Prois said drug users don't think logically and that it's becoming more common for them to manufacture IDs and use fake addresses and phone numbers, making themselves hard to track.

The new officer would audit the information entered into the Automated Pawn System to ensure it's descriptive and accurate, work on investigations that involve the pawn shops and oversee day-to-day operations, Prois said.

Pawn shops pay \$1.50 per transaction, which can include more than one item. The city gets 50 cents, and the remaining dollar goes to the APS system. The City Council last week voted 4-0 -- one member was absent -- to approve an increase to \$3. If it's approved in the second reading Monday, the city will get \$2 per transaction, which would help pay for the additional officer.

That would cost Pawn America \$72,000 a year for the Fridley store, Rixmann said.

Carol Plaster frequents both stores and said if any of the new costs end up in her lap, making ends meet would become even harder. She said that after a son's illness she has used the pawn shops to pay her mortgage and electricity bills when she's in a crunch.

"There's bad people that abuse it, but there's bad people that abuse everything," she said, saying that shouldn't raise prices for people who need inexpensive pawn stores to get by.

Sarah McCann • 612-673-7512

How Some Pawn Shops Operate

Last update: November 15, 2005 at 10:50 AM



[Printer friendly](#)



[E-mail this story](#)

- You go into the shop with an item, let's say it's a TV.
- You choose whether to pawn it or sell it.
- If you sell it, the pawn shop owns the TV and you take home the money, say \$100.
- If you pawn it, the pawn shop loans you \$100 and stores the TV. You can pick it up within 30 days with a 23 percent interest charge. So you owe \$123 at the end of 30 days and get your TV back.
- If you still don't have the money within 30 days, there's a 60-day grace period, but every 30 days tacks on another 23 percent charge. So if you waited until the end of the 90 days, you'd pay almost \$170 to get the TV back.
- If you decide you don't want it back at any point, there's no obligation. The pawn shop would keep the TV and you would keep your original \$100.