The question is still being asked, why isn't George Zimmerman locked up?

SANFORD, Fla. (AP) — George Zimmerman once took criminal justice classes at the community college and was practically a one-man neighborhood watch in his gated part of town, calling police close to 50 times over the past eight years to report such things as slow-driving vehicles, strangers loitering in the neighborhood and open garages.

Now, suddenly, people are wondering if the 28-year-old Zimmerman is an earnest if somewhat zealous young man who was just looking out for his neighborhood, or a wannabe cop who tried to take justice into his own hands.

He has been at the center of a growing furor over vigilantism, self-defense and racial profiling since he shot and killed an unarmed black teenager who was walking through his neighborhood Feb. 26 carrying only a bag of Skittles and an iced tea.

Zimmerman, a light-skinned Hispanic, has claimed self-defense in the slaying of 17-year-old Trayvon Martin and has not been charged, but many black leaders are demanding his arrest, and state and federal authorities are investigating. Florida's Stand Your Ground law on self-defense gives people wide latitude to use deadly force.

Attorneys for Martin's parents say Zimmerman is a "loose cannon."

"He's a wannabe police officer," lawyer Benjamin Crump said. "Why did he have a gun?"

But some neighbors welcomed his vigilance, at least before the shooting.

Samantha Leigh Hamilton, an auto-dealership employee who has lived on Zimmerman's street

for about a year, said that she once left her garage door up and Zimmerman noticed it while out walking his dog. He notified another neighbor, who let Hamilton know.

"The only impression I have of George Zimmerman is a good one," Hamilton said Wednesday.

Hamilton said another neighbor, a black woman, would regularly inform Zimmerman when she was out of town so that he could keep an eye on her place. Hamilton said that when she moved into the middle-class, racially mixed community of about 250 identical townhouses, the black neighbor told her, "Hey, if you need anything, you picked a really good area, since George is part of our neighborhood watch."

Zimmerman, who was captain of the neighborhood watch and licensed to carry a gun, made 46 calls to police since 2004, according to department records.

In one police call report, the dispatcher noted that Zimmerman was calling about a vehicle "driving real slow, looking at all the other vehicles in the complex and blasting music." In another call from last August, Zimmerman reported on two black male teens in the neighborhood. He considered them suspicious.

A police spokesman in Sanford, a city of 53,000 people outside Orlando that is 57 percent white and 30 percent black, did not return calls for comment about Zimmerman's repeated reports.

Sanford city commissioners on Wednesday voted 3-2 to express "no confidence" in Police Chief Bill Lee Jr. over the handling of the fatal shooting. The commission can't fire Lee, however, because the police chief reports to the city manager.

Hamilton said there had been several break-ins in the past year, including one three doors away in which burglars took a TV and laptops.

"When I hear about him calling the police constantly, it kind of makes sense to me because we had so many break-ins recently," she said.

The homeowners association's February newsletter said that Sanford police had beefed up patrols in the neighborhood and that officers on bicycles were making random checks of front yards and backyards. It was not clear how big the neighborhood watch was, but Zimmerman was the dominant force.

"If you've been the victim of a crime within the community, after calling the police, please contact our captain, George Zimmerman ... so we can be aware and help address the issue with other residents," the newsletter said. It added that the neighborhood watch group was looking for more participants at its monthly meetings.

USAonWatch, the national neighborhood watch organization, said Zimmerman's watch had never registered with the group. A vice president of the homeowners association didn't return a call Wednesday.

According to police, Zimmerman spotted Martin walking through the community on the teen's way back from a convenience store. The teenager was visiting his father's fiancée, who lived in the gated community. Zimmerman told a police dispatcher that Martin had his hand at his waistband and had something in his hand.

"This guy looks like he is up to no good — he is on drugs or something," Zimmerman said.

The dispatcher advised Zimmerman not to follow Martin. Moments later, neighbors bombarded 911 with reports of a struggle between the men and the sound of a gunshot. When police officers arrived, Martin was lifeless, face down on the ground, while Zimmerman was bleeding from his head and his back was covered in grass, as if he had been on the ground, the police report said.

Sanford police issued a statement Wednesday defending their decision not to arrest Zimmerman. They said that when officers arrived, he claimed self-defense, "which at the time was supported by physical evidence and testimony."

The police chief said Zimmerman claimed he was attacked by Martin after he had given up his chase and was returning to his truck.

In a letter to the Orlando Sentinel, Zimmerman's father said his son wasn't a racist. Zimmerman's mother is Hispanic. "He would be the last to discriminate for any reason whatsoever," Robert Zimmerman wrote.

Zimmerman moved with his parents from Manassas, Va., to Florida about a decade ago. He lived with his parents in nearby Lake Mary for several years before moving to the Retreat at Twin Lakes, records show. He lives in the gated community with his wife, Shellie, a licensed cosmetologist, but is now in hiding because of death threats.

Zimmerman had taken classes at the local community college, but his work history was spotty. He worked at a pressure washing business and then at CarMax, the national used-car dealer, but left in 2008, according to court records. It was not immediately clear what he did for CarMax or what he has been doing since then.

In 2005, Zimmerman was charged with resisting arrest with violence. State alcohol agents said Zimmerman pushed them while they were arresting a friend of his during an underage drinking operation at a bar. Zimmerman avoided a conviction by going into a pretrial program that is offered to people with no prior arrests.

Neighbor Raffie Gaffar said he is troubled by the fact that Zimmerman patrolled the neighborhood with a gun. Gaffar, a registered nurse, said he had never met Zimmerman and lived in a different section of the development.

"That is crazy. That is totally crazy," Gaffar said. "Why does he have to carry a gun? Something is totally wrong with that picture."