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Somerton's making noise about produce trailer

By William Kenny
Times Staff Writer

Somerton Civic Association members like the idea of having an independent fresh produce store in their neighborhood. But they don't seem to like it when somebody parks a trailer in their midst without first checking with neighbors.

During the SCA's monthly meeting on Dec. 12, members insisted that the owners of Green Farmer's Market, at 13033 Bustleton Ave., remove a white refrigeration trailer from the business' parking lot.

Neighbors believe that the truck is an eyesore and, if operated, would pollute the area with noise from the mechanized cooling units.

Complaints about the trailer, which sits at the rear of the produce store, arose when representatives for the business sought the civic group's consent to sell takeout deli items, including sandwiches and cold cuts.

Currently, the store is permitted to sell fruits, vegetables, canned goods, dry goods and other packaged food items. It would need a city zoning certificate to open the deli counter.

"If I lived near that and heard that humming all night long it could make me blow my brains out," said SCA president Mary Jane Hazell, referring to the outdoor refrigeration unit.

Ann Marie Boyle, an aide to City Councilman Brian O'Neill, echoed the consensus feeling about the big white cold box.

Speaking as a resident of Somerton, Boyle said, "That is huge, and I don't think in Somerton that's what the neighbors want."

An attorney representing the store, Jeff Gompers, explained that the owners planned to use the trailer to store fresh produce, which would spoil if not kept in refrigeration. The cold box inside the business is too small.

Green Farmer's Market formerly was in the Lumar Shopping Center, at Bustleton Avenue and Hendrix Street, until moving to its current spot about a year ago, Gompers said. The business has a second location at 9708 Bustleton Ave.

Gompers claimed that he has studied the zoning file for the Somerton location and consulted with the city's Department of Licenses and Inspections and found no regulations prohibiting the refrigeration trailer.

SCA leaders, meanwhile, suggested that the merchant build a cold box on the back of the store if he feels he needs more storage space. That way, noise would be contained inside the building, while the parking lot would be free from the trailer.

Gompers said that the merchant would be willing to remove the trailer as a good-neighbor gesture if the SCA would approve of deli takeout sales.

"If he removes that trailer, then we'll support him on (the deli)," Hazell agreed.

In a separate Bustleton Avenue issue, SCA members appeared divided on the possible merits of a mural project at the Delaware Valley High School, a private alternative school for students with

behavioral problems, at Bustleton and Petoni Place.

Another neighbor suggested limiting the painting to one wall on Bustleton Avenue.

State Rep. George Kenney noted that the male didn't seem to "fit" the mural with his dark mustache and beard. The legislator, 49, noted that he still has difficulty growing a beard.

Hazell agreed that the facial hair seemed a bit much for a typical high school student. Shulick said the school would consider revising the depiction



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► Civic leader Mary Jane Hazell, speaking of the outdoor refrigeration unit

behavioral problems, at Bustleton and Petoni Place.

The students want to display their artwork on the outside of the building. According to school president David Shulick, the mural would cover about 60 percent of the wall facing Bustleton Avenue and possibly 30 percent of the wall facing Petoni.

The school has hired a professional artist to consult with the students, whose design features busts of two students in graduation caps, a white female and a Latino male.

According to Shulick, students at Del Val are high-achieving despite their past troubles. Students come from 10 school districts, including Philadelphia and several in Lower Bucks County. Enrollment is fewer than 100. The school has a 96-percent graduation rate.

"I think it would benefit them to see their work and their design on the building," the president said.

What's more, the school is entitled by law to paint the mural, regardless of neighborhood consent, Shulick explained. Yet, school officials are very much willing to consider suggestions from the community.

The school will accept comments via the Internet at www.dvhs.org for a limited time before proceeding with the project.

At the meeting, one opponent of the project said that people expect to see murals in North Philadelphia, not Somerton. When another resident suggested that they paint the mural inside the building, Shulick snapped, "That's off the table. It's something we can do by right. It's private property, and we can paint it how we want it."

In other SCA business:

• Democratic mayoral candidate Tom Knox served up his introductory stump speech. Unlike other candidates for the office, Knox has already begun airing radio and television ads and is trying to raise his name recognition among voters. Knox retired as regional CEO of U.S. Healthcare to run for the office, which incumbent John F. Street must vacate in January 2008 at the conclusion of his second four-year term.

Knox is a former deputy mayor, having served under now-Gov. Ed Rendell. Knox took credit for helping the Rendell administration turn a \$250 million operating-budget deficit into a surplus in 18 months on the job. He was paid \$1 per year (a total of \$1.50) for his work.

Knox, a self-made multimillionaire who grew up in a public housing project reportedly plans to spend \$5 million of his own cash on the campaign.

• State Rep. Dennis O'Brien recounted his efforts in Harrisburg to lobby for expanded DNA testing for all accused felons, stronger laws against child abuse, expanded health insurance coverage for cases of autism and other medical conditions, and stronger state prison sentences for convicts.

• City Councilman Brian O'Neill presented the SCA with a \$2,000 grant from the Council Activities Fund.

Also, he asked neighbors to back him in his opposition to one Council bill that would construct a new zoning commission charged with rewriting the city's zoning code. O'Neill fears that special interests from the building industry would dominate the commission and create pro-development conditions that could threaten residential neighborhoods.

O'Neill believes that the City Planning Commission should be responsible for re-mapping and that any sweeping changes in the zoning code or process should be taken up by the new mayoral administration. The lead sponsor of the bill, Councilman Frank DiCicco, agreed last Thursday to put a scheduled full-Council vote on hold pending further negotiations among his colleagues.

• State Rep. George Kenney reported that he was among witnesses who testified at a recent City Council hearing to discuss possible safety improvements to Roosevelt Boulevard. Suggested measures include additional red light cameras, speed-enforcement devices and even pedestrian bridges for crossing the 12-lane highway on foot.

Kenney also reported that he recently asked Rina Cutler, the state transportation deputy secretary, to decide on the future of the Woodhaven Road/Route 63 project.

Kenney and the SCA support extending the Woodhaven expressway westward from its terminus at Evans Street to Philmont Avenue at the Montgomery County border. The road would alleviate traffic congestion on Byberry Road and other area roads, the civic group has long argued. Residents in Montgomery County largely oppose the extension. ■■

Reporter William Kenny can be reached at 215-354-3031 or bkenny@phillynews.com

Councilman's taking a break

City Councilman Brian O'Neill's district offices will be closed for the holidays on Christmas Day and New Year's Day.

District office hours will resume Monday, Jan. 8, at 7 p.m. at the Bustleton and Bowler Municipal Building. Here is the councilman's regular schedule:

At the firehouse at Academy and Corny roads on the first and third Mondays of the month; at the Bustleton and Bowler Municipal Building on the second Monday of the month; and at the Fox Chase Library, 501 Rhawn St., on the fourth Monday of the month.

Office hours begin at 7 p.m. Constituents can discuss problems with O'Neill either individually or in groups. No appointment is necessary.

For more information, call O'Neill's City Hall office at 215-686-2422. ■■