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A Lerner Community Newspaper

Mell aide may cobble a compromise with corn-cart vendors Peddlers turn out at 33rd Ward meeting

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Staff Writer

Jaime Andrade Jr., 33rd Ward aldermanic aide, will meet with a group of corn vendors on Friday, July 30, in an effort to work out a compromise in the proposed food-peddler licensing ordinance.

The talk was set up after about a dozen pushcart peddlers and their supporters turned up at a Thursday, July 15, ward Advisory Council meeting at Horner Park field house, 2740 W. Montrose Ave.

Although the vendors arrived too late to be heard at the meeting itself, Andrade and Ald. Richard Mell (33rd) talked for more than a half hour with the pushcart operators, assuring them that the purpose of the proposed legislation isn't to put them out of business, but to protect both their interests and the community's.

"They themselves (the vendors) came up with some ideas of their own, including having the vendors get steel carts with their own hot-water supply," Andrade said later.

That, he explained, might enable the city to drop the requirement that vendors operate only in front of "food establishments" that have given the peddlers permission to use those businesses' washrooms.

"But I don't know for sure at this point," Andrade said.

Mell, who has been the target of occasionally angry demonstrations, denied that he's trying to put the corn vendors out of business.

"All we want to do is license them, make them legal," said Mell, who has been trying to get the city better control over the corn-vending operations in response to ward residents' complaints about litter and his own concerns about public health.

"If someone gets sick from rancid mayonnaise or butter, who do you think they're going to blame for not doing anything to prevent it?" Mell said at a community meeting about a year ago.

In the past two years, Mell's food-vendor ordinance has gone through several incarnations, ranging from a near-ban on pushcart peddlers in the 33rd Ward to the most recent proposal, which calls for citywide licensing of the curbside sale of corn and other food.

The newest version -- hammered out during a series of meetings between community representatives and Chicago Health Commissioner Sister Sheila Lyne -- sets a \$200 licensing fee for pushcart food vendors and provides for fines of between \$50 and \$200 for any violation of the proposed law, which would bar vendors from doing business on residential streets or within 200 feet of a school or place of worship.

The proposal would allow vendors to operate only on commercial streets between 8 a.m. and 9 p.m., and only in one location.

According to the latest draft of the proposed ordinance, vendors would be responsible for picking up any trash and litter left by their customers within 25 feet of their carts.

"This would make them legal," Mell said.

The City Council had been expected to vote on the measure as early as this month, but Andrade said a fine-tuned ordinance won't be ready, "until we've had a chance to talk with the vendors and try to work out some kind of compromise."

Even if agreement with the vendors is reached at the July 30 meeting, the aldermen won't meet again until early September, a spokesman for the City Council sergeant-at-arm's office said.

Also at the July 15 Advisory Council meeting, Mell said he is still trying to find an industrial use for the International Paper Co. property at Addison Street and Kimball Avenue.

A proposal floated earlier this year to sell part of that property to the St. Vincent DePaul Day Care Center, now at Webster Avenue and Halsted Street, was rejected by Mayor Richard Daley.

"I don't know why. I think it had to do with the fact that the city is still trying to keep that site for some kind of manufacturing," Mell said.

Matters are made more complicated by the fact that while International Paper wants \$20 a square foot for the property, Mell said, "Manufacturing is lucky if it can pay \$6 or \$7 a square foot."

And while he would also like to see that site kept for manufacturing, "It's no good to anyone for that property to stay vacant indefinitely," Mell said, adding that if no manufacturing use can be found soon, "we may want to look at commercial or even housing."

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