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VIA EMAIL

Saint Paul City Council Members
Contact-Council@ci.stpaul.mn.us

Dear Saint Paul City Council Members:

I am writing to ask for your support in voting no against Councilmember Dai Thao's amendment against Hmong farmers. If a cap is needed, then 2 or 3 registered commercial trucks per home is good; but 1 is unduly harmful to my (and my fellow Hmong farmers)'s livelihood.

CM Thao's amendment:

- ignores past decisions the City Council has made that has greatly harmed Hmong farmers and led to the need for two or more trucks.
- limits the growth of Hmong farming businesses and the number of Hmong farmers.
- is unfair treatment of Hmong farmers compared to bus drivers and recreational vehicles owners

In light of the fact that my association, Hmong American Farmers Association (HAFA) has been working cooperatively and in good faith with the Saint Paul City Council for the past few months to come to a compromise that would work for everyone, I am deeply disturbed by my council member (CM Thao)'s new amendment.

As a small scale farmer, my livelihood would be greatly harmed by the proposed new amendment. There is no way I can continue or even think about expanding my business when such a harmful amendment would hurt me.

Enclosed is additional information about why I and other Hmong farmers stand against CM Thao's amendment. Please help Hmong farmers like myself.

Sincerely,

Lucie Passus

What is the Problem?

Hmong farmers with box trucks—those white trucks you see many Hmong farmers driving—were getting cited and then ticketed for parking their trucks in front of their homes.

According to Saint Paul ordinances, parking a commercial truck is not allowed on residential streets. And since the box trucks are considered commercial trucks, it was against the law.

The tickets are upwards of \$1,000 for the fine, surcharges associated with the fine, and towing costs and impound fees. Not to mention the lost sales from the days the truck is in the impound lot.

What is the Solution?

According to Saint Paul's Code of Ordinances: Section. 157.11--Parking for larger vehicles--commercial vehicles are banned from being parked on residentially zones streets. However, the City does allow for bus drivers to park their buses (which are considered commercial) for up to four hours on a residential street. Moreover, recreational vehicles, if properly licensed, can also park on residential streets.

In October 2015, Pakou Hang of the Hmong American Farmers Association (HAFA) emailed Council President and Ward 4 representative, Council Member (CM) Russ Stark, about this issue and asked if there was any help that could be given the farmers. Pakou met with CM Stark and representatives from Licensing and Inspection, Zoning and the City Attorney's Office. A decision was made to ask for an amendment to the current ordinance to exempt farmers from the current parking rule as long as they registered their trucks and paid a fee. Moreover, the exemption would only be from March to November when the farmers markets were in prime season.

In April 2016, CM Stark presented this issue to the City Council and the Council voted unanimously to approve the amendment.

If the Vote Passed, Why Do You Need Our Help?

But after the vote was passed, CM Dai Thao, who represents Ward 1, offered an amendment to the recent amendment passed. (For clarity purposes, we will call the previous amendment CM Stark's amendment and the current amendment CM Thao's amendment.)

According to CM Thao, there may be neighbor outcry due to limited parking, so he is adding an amendment to CM Stark's amendment. Thao wants to limit the number of trucks registered to a household to only one. In other words, under Thao's new amendment, farmers can only have one truck registered to their house. If they have a second truck, they cannot park it on a residential street or else they could get ticketed and fined like before.

WE THINK CM DAI THAO'S AMENDMENT IS WRONG AND WE NEED TO STOP IT!

Why is CM Thao's Amendment Bad?

There are three main reasons why this amendment is wrong and should be stopped.

Dai's amendment ignores past decisions the City Council has made that has greatly harmed Hmong farmers and led to the need for two or more trucks.

- Over half of the farmers in the Saint Paul Farmers Market are Hmong.
- In 2012 the City Council voted to approve funds to build a baseball stadium on the old Gillette factory site which is located next to the Saint Paul Farmers Market. As part of those plans, hundreds of parking spaces used by Saint Paul Farmers Market customers on Saturday and Sunday were eliminated.
- Then in 2015, parking meters were put along Prince Street and other smaller streets next to the Saint Paul Farmers Market. The elimination of the free parking spots on top of the devastation caused by the light rail construction has caused farmers market sales on average to drop 30% compared to sales in 2010.
- On top of these bad decisions by the Council, the seemingly benign proliferation of farmers markets in the metropolitan area by neighborhood or church groups without increasing the number of people coming to the markets overall, has created a saturation of farmers markets. What that means is less sales for farmers.
- For example, the Saint Paul Farmers Market's Saturday and Sunday markets used to be the most profitable markets for the Hmong farmers. But due to all the dynamics described above, many farmers now have to go to two markets, at the same time, to make as much money as they used to at just one. For example, on Saturdays now, many Hmong farmers may have a stall at the Saturday downtown farmers market as well as a stall at the Saturday Burnsville market just to earn as much as they used to. **Hence the need for the second truck.**

Dai's amendment limits the growth of Hmong farming businesses and the number of Hmong farmers.

- Currently, most Hmong farmers live in Saint Paul or Ramsey County and rent land in surrounding communities to farm. While many want to buy their own farms, the cost of land is too expensive and accessing agricultural loans has been very hard. Without their own land, Hmong farmers cannot plant perennials or be certified organic, all practices that could increase their sales.
- Moreover, institutional racism and exploitation has led to great economic disparities between Hmong farmers and other mainstream Minnesota vegetable growers. According to HAFA's longitudinal study (which was started in 2012) Hmong farmers on average earn only \$5,000 per acre compared to mainstream Minnesota growers who earn \$8,000.
- By allowing only one truck to be registered at an address, CM Thao's amendment sends a message to Hmong farmers that they can only grow their farming business to a certain point. This is destructive especially in light of HAFA studies that suggest Hmong farmers are barely making it and need to seek out other avenues of economies of scale to make their farming businesses profitable. In other words, Hmong farmers need all options in front of them to make their business work including buying another truck and selling at two markets simultaneously.

- In essence, CM Thao's amendment trades the livelihood of hundreds of Hmong farming families for more parking spots.

Dai's amendment is unfair treatment of Hmong farmers compared to bus drivers and recreational vehicles owners.

- The city gives bus drivers special exemptions to this parking rule and allows recreational vehicles to be parked on residential streets as long as they are specially licensed. Nowhere in the code of ordinances does it state that only one bus be assigned to a bus driver's address or that a homeowner may register only one recreational vehicle. Why would the City apply one restriction to Hmong business owners but not to others? All we are asking is for equal treatment for Hmong farmers.