

### Day-labor setup gets scrutiny

Aurora is considering restricting how employers recruit workers on city streets, calling the practice "a safety issue."

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Aurora - The city is considering restricting how employers hire day laborers on city streets, a process officials say is dangerous and sometimes takes advantage of the workers.

Councilwoman Deborah Wallace is proposing a measure to prohibit "vehicle solicitation" by employers on certain streets.

It would also require employers to tell their workers in advance the wages they'll be earning and how they'd be transported to the hospital if they are injured on the job.

Employers who violate the law would face a \$1,000 fine.

"It's a safety issue," Wallace said. "We can get it under control, hopefully."

A City Council committee decided Tuesday to study the matter before it gets to the full council.

The area under scrutiny is on Dayton Street just off East Colfax Avenue. There are numerous businesses, narrow streets and blind corners that make maneuvering in and out tricky.

Early Tuesday, about three dozen workers, mostly Latinos and some undocumented, gathered on Dayton as pickups pulled up looking for workers such as Juan Manuel, a 42-year-old from Guadalajara, Mexico.

Manuel supports his wife and three kids back in Mexico with the work he gets here. He makes from \$8 to \$10 an hour landscaping, roofing and doing construction. But he worries that if the city pushes his employers out, he may not have the steady income he and his family need.

"I don't understand why they are doing this," Manuel said in Spanish. "If the city doesn't like it, maybe the city should put us to work."

City officials reiterated that they are not looking to run the temporary employers and day laborers out of town. They just want to make it safe for them and neighbors.

Councilwoman Molly Markert said there may not be a need for new regulations. She asked the city to look for another area where the employers can go to seek out workers. And if they can't find one, then police could just monitor the area, she said.

Lisa Duran, director of Rights for All People, said finding a different location is better than imposing new regulations.

"I think it's critical to respect the human rights of every person, including undocumented immigrants," she said. "We don't want to criminalize mothers and fathers who want to feed their families."

Aurora is not alone in its struggle over what to do with day laborers. Denver pays \$150,000 annually for a downtown building with ample parking where the employers and employees can meet each day.

But Denver, Lakewood, Colorado Springs, Pueblo and Fort Collins do not have ordinances on the books regulating day laborers or their employers.

Aurora Assistant City Attorney David Lathers said Tuesday that problem is mainly confined to the Dayton/Colfax site, an area that Wallace represents. The employers and workers are "creating quite a traffic hazard."

Lathers said he has heard stories of the immigrants being taken advantage of. However, he said, most employer-employee issues are regulated by the state and federal governments.

But the city realizes it needs a safer and better place.

So does Pam Ortega, who runs an employment agency next to where the day laborers meet.

Once, she called U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement. Sometimes those who don't get hired stick around and drink beer in the parking lot.

But as long as they don't gather directly in front of her business, Tandem Staffing Solutions Inc., she doesn't have too much of a problem with it, even if she could be losing business.

"It's OK," she said, "but I'm glad the city is taking a look at this."

Staff writer Manny Gonzales contributed to this report.

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