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Neighbors protest new SEPTA bus facility

By John O. Mason
Special to the Tribune

Residents of the Germantown area are protesting the construction of a new SEPTA bus depot and maintenance facility on the site of the old Midvale and Heppenstal steel plant at Wissahickon and Roberts avenues.

At two public meetings, residents made their concerns known to SEPTA representatives.

The first meeting was held in the basketball court of the Happy Hollow Recreation Center at 4800 Wayne Ave. earlier this month 1993.

Ernest "Rusty" Acchione, senior project manager; Joseph Marchese, senior program manager; and Louis Grisoglio, community relations representative answered people's questions about ground pollution from underground tanks, air pollution from buses entering and leaving the facility.

The meetings were organized by Rosita Youngblood, 13th ward Democratic leader.

Marchese spoke first, saying, "It's my department (Engineering and Construction) that's responsible for the design and construction of the Midvale bus garage. Rusty Acchione is the project manager for the Midvale bus garage. Many issues have been addressed, and we have tried to be sensitive to as many community issues as we can. Although we have not been directly in touch with many of the communities, we've done as much as we can in the way of landscaping, location of the facility. We've tried to be as unobtrusive as possible, and trying to be out of sight so not to interfere with your life and your community."

Marchese stated that SEPIA would follow strict guidelines laid down by the federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the state Department of Environmental Protection (DEP).

Marchese and Acchione used aerial photos and diagrams to show the location of the facility and what its parts would be. One part, said Marchese, would be for storing buses.

"We plan to maintain and store approximately 275 and three 300 buses out of this facility," he said.

Marchese added that returning buses would be checked for damages and have their fares collected. Then the buses would be refueled, checked, washed, and stored overnight.

One source of concern was the underground storage tanks, which would be used to store gasoline, diesel fuel, waste oil, and antifreeze. Residents fear that these fluids would leak from their tanks and seep into the ground.

Acchione explained that the tanks would be encased in concrete vaults monitored by leak detection systems and containment areas. "Even if a tank was to leak," he said. "It's contained within an area and there's no leakage into the soil."

The next meeting on the proposed SEPTA facility was held in the squad room of the 39th Police District, 22nd Street and Hunting Park Avenue.

One Germantown resident, Domanic Giordano, expressed fears of the underground tanks, saying: "(SEPTA) could pull out in about two years, and nobody's going to know anything about it (the tanks.) There was supposed to have been a shopping center (on the site) about three years ago, and now SEPTA wants the property. They're just going to destroy it."

Marchese and Acchione covered the same concerns they did with the previous evening's group of residents.

Youngblood was also present in this meeting, stating that the Midvale and Heppenstal site was originally slated to be turned into an industrial park and shopping mall.

"Everybody was put on notice that there would be jobs in the community, this would be an industrial park with building as far as corporations coming in." Youngblood also recalled that SEPTA's relocation would be temporary.

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