

Bill introduced to block Mt. Vernon 24-hour store

By Annie Linskey

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Seeking to prevent a 24-hour 7-Eleven store from opening near the Washington Monument in Mount Vernon, Baltimore City Councilman William H. Cole IV introduced a bill today that would restrict the operating hours of any convenience store in the historic district.

"A 24-hour location in that area is not going to help the community at all," he said. "Everything to me says this is not going to be a good fit."

He said he's troubled by the late-night crowds drawn to a 7-Eleven in Federal Hill and would rather see the Mount Vernon building remain vacant than allow the store.

Ellen Valentino, a lobbyist for 7-Eleven, said she had not yet read the councilman's proposal but would like to meet with him to understand his concerns.

"Baltimore is important to us," she said.

Gregory N. Friedman, who owns the storefront, declined to comment.

Cole's bill would amend the neighborhood's urban renewal plan to require that any convenience store in the historic district be closed from 11 p.m. to 5 a.m., seven days a week.

Neighborhood activists have opposed the plan to bring the store to the vacant site at the southeast corner of Charles and Centre streets, fearing that it would attract intoxicated bar patrons after closing time and draw people from a planned 24-hour homeless shelter on Fallsway.

Last month a group of city agencies, cultural groups and neighbors raised \$297,000 to buy the building, but their efforts fell short of the \$450,000 sale price.

Cole also said he will "fight to the end of the earth" to prevent the store from receiving a liquor license, though such a struggle might not be necessary. Nancy Wade, a real estate manager for 7-Eleven, said none of the 21 franchises in the city has a liquor license and she would not seek one for the Mount Vernon location.

Cole worries that company officials might change their minds down the road.

It is unclear how much support Cole will have for his measure. Councilwoman Helen Holton, chairman of the Taxation, Finance and Economic Development Committee, declined to sign onto the measure because she believes it is dangerously close to "spot zoning," a practice of changing the rules for a single site.

"You can't go around picking and choosing," she said. "That is how you end up with the hodgepodge of zoning rules that you have now. Make the rules apply for everybody."