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### **City Officials Make Historic Commitments to Eastwick Residents**

Philadelphia, Pa. – At a July 16 community meeting convened by Councilman Kenyatta Johnson, more than 140 Eastwick residents celebrated being one step closer to community-based planning processes for both the future of a 135-acre parcel of land and flood mitigation infrastructure.

Brian Abernathy, executive director of the Philadelphia Redevelopment Authority (PRA), told the standing-room-only crowd that within the next five months he would work to settle and hopefully bring to a close a decades-old Redevelopment Agreement that currently gives developer Korman Company the option to purchase a 135-acre undeveloped parcel of land adjacent to the Heinz National Wildlife Refuge. Upon return of the land to the control of PRA, Abernathy indicated the agency would work with Philadelphia City Planning Commission to initiate a community-based planning process to guide decisions regarding the land's end uses. Such a planning process would mark the first planning process for Eastwick in more than 50 years.

“We are extremely pleased that this land is significantly closer to coming back into the purview of the community, and thrilled the city is acknowledging the planning process we deserve after decades of municipal neglect and disinvestment,” said Terry Williams, President of the Eastwick Friends & Neighbors Coalition (EFNC), who was born and raised and returned to live in Eastwick. For more than three years EFNC and the larger community has successfully advocated to stave off Korman's unwanted and ecologically unsound development of the parcel. “Now, we will work to help city, state, and federal officials to fulfill the commitments that were made during tonight's historic discussion and ensure they find resources to support Eastwick residents for the long haul.”

“This is an historic moment for this vital neighborhood,” said Councilman Johnson. “I look forward to continuing to support the community as we move through the next few months, and into a potential planning process that will provide residents a strong voice in the future of their neighborhood.”

Eastwick, located in southwest Philadelphia, borders the Heinz National Wildlife Refuge and the Philadelphia International Airport. Much of the neighborhood is located in a federally designated floodplain and has been subject to severe flooding from nearby Cobbs and Darby Creeks. In the 1950s, PRA condemned and seized 2,300 acres of the neighborhood by eminent domain, destroying homes and displacing over 8,000 people. This land grab subjected the community to years of unstable development, neighborhood segregation, and economic distress. PRA acknowledged the negative impact of this top-down approach at the meeting and suggested future planning processes would be conducted with and for residents.

In addition to PRA's discussion of the future of the Redevelopment Agreement and the 135-acre parcel, Philadelphia Water (PWD) and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers announced their intent to secure federal funding to develop a flood mitigation plan for the neighborhood. PWD has already committed to fund 50% of the next step of flood mitigation studies and urged residents to press state and federal elected officials for additional funding. This announcement comes after PWD and the Army Corps concluded a flood mitigation study in 2014, which determined that a proposed levee was not an appropriate flood mitigation strategy, as it would exacerbate flooding upstream and downstream.

By organizing to address development of the 135-acre parcel, EFNC and residents successfully brought the long-standing issue of flooding to the attention of city agencies after decades of dealing with persistent flooding dangers and trauma. Residents at Thursday's meeting noted they look forward to working with the Army Corps and PWD to make sure this next study results in real solutions for Eastwick homes and the community-at-large.

"This community meeting showed that city and state officials are listening and responding to residents in Eastwick," said Amy Laura Cahn, an attorney with the Public Interest Law Center who has represented EFNC since 2012. "Tonight's discussion indicated we are taking the first steps in what we hope will be a truly community-based planning process that allows the community to self-determine its future and ultimately move beyond the 1950s designation as a 'blighted' community."

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#### About the Eastwick Friends & Neighbors Coalition

The Eastwick Friends & Neighbors Coalition brings together community stakeholders in planning and advocating for an environmentally, economically and socially sustainable future for the Eastwick community. The Eastwick Friends & Neighbors Coalition is committed to ensuring that after six decades, the community is finally made whole and has a voice in its own future.

[www.EastwickFriends.wordpress.com](http://www.EastwickFriends.wordpress.com)

#### About the Public Interest Law Center

The Public Interest Law Center uses high-impact legal strategies to improve the well-being and life prospects of vulnerable populations by ensuring they have access to fundamental resources including a high-quality public education, access to health care, employment, housing, safe and healthy neighborhoods and the right to vote. For more information visit [www.pubintl.org](http://www.pubintl.org) or on Twitter @PubIntLawCtr.