



# EASTWICK FRIENDS & NEIGHBORS COALITION, Inc.

A registered Community Organization (RCO)

Proud Recipient of the Bread & Roses Community Empowerment Award

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November 9, 2016

Joyce S. Wilkerson  
Chair  
Philadelphia School Reform Commission  
440 North Broad Street, Suite 101  
Philadelphia, PA 19130

To Chair Wilkerson and the members of the Philadelphia School Reform Commission,

We are writing to you, as residents of Philadelphia's Eastwick community, asking that you stop the sale of the Pepper Middle School (Pepper) and Communications Technology High School (ComTech) properties to engage the community, as well as the City of Philadelphia and its economic and community development agencies, regarding the future of these properties. In keeping with the requests of Mayor James Kenney and Councilman Kenyatta Johnson, we believe that the best way to engage the community and the city would be through the careful consideration provided by the Philadelphia Redevelopment Authority's Eastwick planning process, which is already underway.

We fully recognize and are extremely sensitive to the Philadelphia School District's dire need for the revenue from the sale of the Pepper and ComTech properties. We also understand your mandate to "achieve the maximum market rate value in the sale . . . of any real property the District owns[.]" At the same time the SRC's own policies are clear on the need to balance this mandate with the "need to maintain an appropriate level of community involvement and engagement throughout all disposition . . . processes" along with an explicit recognition that the City of Philadelphia and its various economic and community development agencies are "significant community partners with the School District in its real property disposition . . . activities."

The value of a delay to your partners in the community and the City are very significant in many respects.

- The thirty-seven acre Pepper property alone is a large and environmentally sensitive public asset. It should be important to all of us to ensure that whoever acquires the Pepper and ComTech sites has the capacity to develop and maintain the site so that it is not a threat and is, instead, a benefit for the public safety, health, and welfare of Eastwick.
- Like much of Eastwick, the entirety of the Pepper parcel is within the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Special Flood Hazard Area. In fact, the Pepper site and surrounding properties are at the lowest elevation in the neighborhood, perhaps, the city. Hurricane Floyd of 1999 inundated the property with eight feet of water. That eighty percent of the Pepper parcel is permeable has mitigated the risk to surrounding properties, but development will change that. Whoever acquires the Pepper site must have the capacity to

address stormwater management issues and the threat of catastrophic flooding for the parcel and surrounding properties.

- The Pepper property has also been identified as a likely brownfields. The school building is said to contain asbestos and there is serious concern about environmental contamination elsewhere on the property. Moreover, since Pepper's closure, the property has attracted massive amounts of illegal dumping, which may have added to the environmental burdens of the property. A new owner must have the capacity and a plan to investigate and address any ongoing problems associated with Eastwick's legacy of environmental contamination on this property.
- Finally, a large portion of the Pepper parcel consists of a public recreation facility, including baseball fields and basketball and tennis courts. Even while Pepper has been shuttered these facilities have been heavily utilized by residents and have become an important community resource. It is important to the community that they have a voice in the future of this public resource.

Eastwick residents are excited by the opportunity to work with the SRC on community involvement and engagement on the future of the Pepper and ComTech properties. Since 2012, Eastwick residents have requested that the community be provided an opportunity to work with its public sector partners to plan for Eastwick's future. In December of 2015, those requests finally became a reality when the Philadelphia Redevelopment Authority and the Philadelphia International Airport, with the encouragement and approval of the Mayor, committed to convening and investing in an Eastwick planning process. This collective victory signals a huge shift following a sixty-year legacy of displacement, disinvestment, and environmental burdens. This process will prioritize community engagement and stakeholder consensus building, while bringing needed attention to existing and future environmental and economic conditions. That type of process is exactly what is needed for these parcels and is what the SRC's policies contemplate.

Delaying your decision to allow for the full engagement of the community and the City would be fully consistent with your stated policies. Moreover, we think it is clear that this additional engagement will not adversely affect the School District's ability to realize a full price for the property. We believe that participation in the Redevelopment Authority's planning process will likely result in additional bidders for the property and that gaining increased community buy-in will help to facilitate future zoning and permitting. Competitive bidding along with a smoother regulatory approval process is likely to produce higher bids and thus a higher price to the School District.

We appreciate your sensitivity to the needs of the Eastwick community. We welcome the opportunity to discuss our concerns and next steps.

Sincerely,

Carolyn Y. Moseley  
Pastor Darien Thomas  
Earl Wilson  
Joanne Graham

President, Eastwick Community Network  
Walk in the Light Ministries  
President, Eastwick Action Committee  
Chair, Environmental Justice Committee, Eastwick Friends and  
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Leo Brundage  
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cc: Mayor James Kenney  
Councilman Kenyatta Johnson  
Senator Robert Casey  
Congressman Robert Brady  
State Senator Anthony Hardy Williams  
State Senator Lawrence M. Farnese Jr.  
State Representative Maria Donatucci  
Deputy Mayor James Engler  
Anne Fadullon, Director, Office of Planning and Development  
Gregory Heller, Executive Director, Philadelphia Redevelopment Authority  
Martine DeCamp, Philadelphia City Planning Commission  
Christine Knapp, Director, Office of Sustainability  
Claire Landau, Chief of Staff, School Reform Commission  
Fran Burns, Chief Operating Officer, Philadelphia School District