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Philadelphia Redevelopment Authority, Korman reach historic deal for Eastwick

End to largest urban renewal project in history, control of 135-acres returned to the public control

Philadelphia, Pa. – The Philadelphia Redevelopment Authority (PRA) and developer Korman Residential have reached an historic agreement, which terminates the 50-year old Eastwick Redevelopment Agreement and returns control of approximately 135 acres of land adjacent to the Heinz National Wildlife Refuge back to PRA. The transfer to PRA comes with a four-year purchase option to the City of Philadelphia, subject to the results of a planning process, to be led by the Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

This deal comes after almost four years of advocacy by the Eastwick Friends & Neighbors Coalition (EFNC) and the broader Eastwick community to stave off unwanted and ecologically unsound development of this land. Under the Redevelopment Agreement, Korman Residential had held the development rights to the land for over fifty years.

“We are thrilled that this land is coming back under public control,” said Terry Williams, President of EFNC, who was born and raised and returned to live in Eastwick. “We are ready to work with the city to conduct the planning process promised to us last July to rejuvenate our community after decades of neglect and disinvestment. This is monumental to so many folks—folks who have passed on and folks who are still watching over this neighborhood.”

At a public meeting hosted by Councilman Kenyatta Johnson last July, PRA publicly pledged to lead a community-based planning process for the undeveloped land in Eastwick, if a deal with Korman could be secured. The last plan created for Eastwick was in 1957, a plan that led to the condemnation of over 2300 acres of land and the displacement of over 8000 people, in order to create the nation’s largest urban renewal project. PRA has acknowledged the negative impact of the top-down approach of years past and suggested future planning processes would be conducted with and for residents. Councilman Johnson has also consistently spoken of the need for the community to be involved in decision-making.

“This is an historic moment for this vital neighborhood,” said Councilman Johnson. “I look forward to supporting the community as we move into a planning process. We will ensure that residents will have a strong voice in the future of their neighborhood, including if and when the City chooses to exercise its purchase option.”

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 chronic stormwater issues and severe flooding from nearby Cobbs and Darby Creeks, as well as the impact of two Superfund sites, sinking homes, and a host of other environmental issues.

In 2012, residents discovered, by accident, that Korman intended to build 722 rental units and 1034 parking spaces on a portion of the larger undeveloped parcel, raising huge concerns from residents and environmental groups. Citing a lack of community input and impact of development on stormwater management and flooding, District Councilman Johnson put a stop to the zoning changes necessary for

Korman to build. Instead, Councilman Johnson and Mayor-elect Jim Kenney responded to resident concerns by holding hearings on flooding in Eastwick, spurring a series of efforts to begin mitigating decades-old problems.

“Eastwick residents have been working for years to self-determine the future of their community and move beyond being labeled as a “blighted” neighborhood,” said Amy Laura Cahn, a staff attorney with the Public Interest Law Center and legal counsel to EFNC, along with Dechert LLP. “We know that the Kenney Administration will work with residents to find the best solution for the land. Today’s agreement signals a new era for Eastwick and demonstrates, once again, that communities are powerful.”

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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

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 or on Twitter @PubIntLawCtr.