

## Eastwick sees end to largest urban-renewal deal in U.S. history

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The largest urban renewal project in the nation's history has officially come to an end.

Half a century after beginning the remaking of Philadelphia's Eastwick section - over the protests of residents, more than 8,000 of whom were displaced in the process - the Philadelphia Redevelopment Authority and a developer have reached a settlement to end that 1961 redevelopment deal.

Community members and environmental activists cheered at the close of a special meeting Wednesday, as PRA's board agreed to pay \$5 million to New Eastwick Corp., a joint venture of Korman Corp., to buy out its interest in the last 135 acres of vacant land.

That clears the way for what PRA executive director Brian Abernathy pledged will be a community-driven planning process - a first for the neighborhood.

"This gives us the opportunity to start over and get it right," said PRA board chairman James Cuorato.

The urban renewal agreement had granted the developer the option to build on more than 2,000 acres. It eventually built 3,000 homes, 1,100 apartments, two shopping centers and an airport hotel complex - an overall success according to Abernathy.

But, during that process, the community was a "war zone," said Terry Williams, president of Eastwick Friends and Neighbors Coalition. He said his family was displaced from three different homes in Eastwick when he was between the ages of 6 and 16.

"It was traumatic. I really saw the pressure my parents were under being forced to find another place for us to live," he said.

It was in part because of that legacy that community members and environmentalists had protested Korman's most recent proposal, in 2013, to build an apartment complex on the last 135 acres of land in Eastwick.

They also feared it would exacerbate already-significant flooding in the area, and harm the adjacent John Heinz National Wildlife Refuge. The neighborhood is within a floodplain, as much of it was marshland before it was filled and leveled for development. It also borders two Superfund sites, which means residents fear floodwaters from the Cobbs and Darby creeks could wash in untold toxins.

In August of this year, Korman again sought to take title to the site, according to Abernathy. The PRA refused on the grounds that Korman had not produced viable plans for the site, he said.

That set off settlement negotiations. The \$5 million, drawn from PRA's cash reserve, is less than some had expected.

"We think the number is below fair market value," Abernathy said.

Under the resolution adopted by PRA, the agency will convey any remaining wetlands to the city and embark on a planning process for the rest of the land.

That means residents will have a voice in their community - something they've been denied for decades, said Amy Laura Cahn, of the Public Interest Law Center, which has been working on behalf of community members.

"This means the end of an injustice that began with seizing 2,300 acres of land and displacing 8,000 people, and creating what is a lovely, quiet community but also beset with huge environmental problems," she said.

There have been conversations in the past about whether some portion of the land could be incorporated into the wildlife refuge.

Lamar Gore, refuge manager at Heinz, could not confirm that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service would be willing to purchase the land. But, he said, "We'd be interested to work with any party that has the land, and we'd like the community to be involved in what that looks like."

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