

Legislation Text

File #: 210751, **Version:** 0

Authorizing the Committee on the Environment to conduct hearings to examine flooding risks, impacts, and mitigation options in Eastwick and other vulnerable Southwest Philadelphia communities

WHEREAS, Eastwick is a historically Black community that has been disproportionately impacted by environmental hardships; and

WHEREAS, In the early to mid-twentieth century, Eastwick was known as “The Meadows,” a sparsely populated, quiet, semi-rural community built among the marshlands. Unlike most of Philadelphia during the 1940s and 1950s, the area was racially integrated; and

WHEREAS, By the 1950s, city representatives believed the area was underutilized, specifically pointing out the low density, auto junkyards, burning garbage dumps, and open drainage canals that populated Eastwick and designated the area as “blighted”; and

WHEREAS, In 1953, the City of Philadelphia’s Planning Department released a preliminary Redevelopment Area Plan for Eastwick, and in 1957 the Redevelopment Authority finalized the Eastwick Urban Renewal Plan. It designated the largest urban renewal area in the United States at that time and called for a \$78 million redevelopment, complete with homes, schools, parks, and commercial and industrial areas; and

WHEREAS, Despite community opposition to this plan, it was approved by City Council. The Redevelopment Authority utilized eminent domain to seize over 2,500 acres of land and relocate over 8,000 residents. The project was halted in the mid-1970s after an environmental assessment found there were significant adverse conditions such as air pollution and major flood risks; and

WHEREAS, The development of Eastwick radically reduced the extent of flood-mitigating tidal marshland in the area, and covered the existing area with non-pervious surfaces that do not allow for water absorption, increasing the amount of run off into the surrounding creeks and other waterways; and

WHEREAS, Eastwick is in a particularly vulnerable position due to its proximity to the Clearview Landfill which was used for years as an unlicensed dump for commercial, industrial, institutional, and municipal waste. While the EPA is continuing the cleanup of this site, each flood holds the dangerous possibility of contamination of the local creeks and groundwater; and

WHEREAS, Currently, Eastwick continues to be particularly susceptible to floods due to the neighborhood being located at the lowest elevation point in the city and being surrounded by waterways prone to overflows and flooding. Climate change will also cause Eastwick to be impacted by future sea level rises, increased precipitation, and higher chances of extreme storms; and

WHEREAS, In August 2020, Tropical Storm Isaias hit Philadelphia and sent several feet of water into the Eastwick neighborhood, destroying hundreds of homes and businesses and evacuating thousands of Philadelphians. Residents were left without electricity and utilities for days, and many experienced costly

flooding-related damage. Unless the problems are addressed and solutions are found, Eastwick will continue to be devastated by the impacts of flooding; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, This Council hereby authorizes the Committee on the Environment to conduct hearings to examine flooding risks, impacts, and mitigation options in Eastwick and other vulnerable Southwest Philadelphia communities.