

# The East Phillips Indoor Urban Farm Project

## An Ethical Imperative

Carol Pass, Board President of EPIC

May, 2019

**Ethical Imperative:** The Roof Depot site has become the focal point of a struggle between the Minneapolis Department of Public Works and East Phillips over the community's self-determination and its right to protect its children from harm. This is not some abstract "feel-good" concept as some have suggested. It is based on the belief that residents should have the right to protect their children and themselves from the very serious health-challenging and life-destroying effects of asthma, ADHD and cancer, caused by hazardous air pollution from the heavily polluting industries already in the Roof Depot area. The many additional huge diesel trucks coming with the proposed City Water Yard project along with hundreds of employee vehicles will add to the cumulative pollution already emanating from adjacent asphalt plant, foundry and roadways. These major industries are only a fence or an alleyway's distance from family housing and apartments with many small children and their playground as well as a major daycare center, and it is less than a block from the largest urban Native American population in the United States, Little Earth of United Tribes, with their large population of children and many vulnerable adults. That parents and friends of the neighborhood should fight against this pollution and try to mitigate it as well as the dangerous traffic congestion should surprise no one. Frankly, it is a duty incumbent on all of us, especially City Leaders, to try to mitigate negative impacts on low income families and children with few resources. The objections of the neighborhood should be responded to by the City with generosity and a clear effort to assist those who are trying to better a situation that has pulled down the lives of the people of East Phillips for generations. The community is saying, "enough is enough". The neighborhood families have hosted this life-damaging situation long enough. They wonder why City leaders will not listen, understand and respond.

**The History, & the Community's Solution:** In 2014 East Phillips residents looked again at solving our serious air pollution problems. More scientific evidence had become available relating the dire consequences of air pollution to our children. We were making a major effort to remove the two biggest sources of this pollution, the asphalt plant and the foundry, from the neighborhood when we heard that the owners of the Roof Depot indicated a desire to sell. EPIC, the East Phillips Improvement Coalition, along with neighbors and other organizations sought to gain control of the 7 ½-Acre site to prevent its sale to another polluting industry. Residents and local organizations had already been pursuing the goal of green jobs and an economic future for people here with limited education. We had been lobbying the state Department of Employment and Economic Development for months for funding to try to produce a "job creator" for our low-income residents. Suddenly all the things that we were most concerned about seemed to come together. The Community saw that the Roof Depot site could provide a pollution-free source for jobs while we continue to work to remove the asphalt plant and foundry. Many community meetings were held as the residents and members of local organizations came together, hired a professional consultant and developed a plan to re-use the building and the whole 7 ½-acres for a community-driven sustainable low-impact industry to provide an economic future for people in Phillips, something dramatically needed and never before attempted here.

**The 2015 Community Plan:** The plan that emerged from countless meetings through 2015 and 16, the East Phillips Indoor Urban Farm project, gained traction with strong support from the Native American Community, the Somali and Hispanic communities and other interested neighbors. The Community sought and found investors, presented and received unanimous endorsement of the plan from the 150 residents at the 2015 East Phillips Annual Meeting. At this time, EPIC contacted and began negotiating with the owners of the Roof Depot site for purchase. Also, during this time, we learned of the city's interest in this property... and we also learned that this interest and their plans went back over a decade without ever informing and including us, the affected community.

In 2016, our years of lobbying with the State began to pay off. With the help of legislation sponsored by Rep. Karen Clark and senators Jeff Hayden and Patricia Torres Ray, EPIC received a MN Dept. of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) grant to plan and help develop the East Phillips Neighborhood Indoor Urban Farm project. As indicated in the grant, EPIC and others helped form an inclusive non-profit corporation with the name East Phillips Neighborhood Institute Inc. (EPNI) to be responsible for the creation of the Indoor Urban Farm. The plan initially involved repurposing and reusing the entire building, adding at least 28 units of affordable family housing and creating one of the largest solar arrays in the state to power it.

### **East Phillips Indoor Urban Farm Goals:**

- 1) Green, Living-wage Jobs for the community
- 2) Second chance job opportunities
- 3) Job Training
- 4) Organic, Aquaponic year-round food production
- 5) Affordable Family Housing
- 6) Coffee Shop/World Café
- 7) Community Kitchen
- 8) Cultural Markets
- 9) Bicycle shop on the Midtown Greenway
- 10) Economic and Environmental Justice for East Phillips

**The City's response - Collision Course:** In 2015, **the City threatened the use of Eminent Domain** and the Roof Depot owners quit talking to us. The City Council voted 9-4 to allow Public Works to purchase the building, which they did, and to convert the site to more industry – the City Water and Sewer Maintenance facility. CMs Gordon, Frey and Andrew Johnson joined C.M. Cano in opposition. As a condition of the Council vote, Public Works appointed the GAC committee to determine community use should there be any un-needed space at the site. As the meetings proceeded, we struggled to get the community voice heard while the City's space needs at the site ballooned well beyond water yard needs, even including early voting space, guaranteeing that there would be no excess space for the community. In mid-2017, at the 4<sup>th</sup> GAC meeting, Staff Chair Bob Friddle erupted angrily and threateningly to prohibited State Rep. Karen Clark from explaining how the Cumulative Pollution Legislation she wrote would affect this project. His angry fist-waving-rush across the room shocked us all. Rep. Clark, saying she would not tolerate such disrespect, left the building. The Native Americans, also claiming disrespect, left followed by most of the remaining GAC members, thus terminating the GAC charade. Since then, the Community has been trying with no success to have meaningful negotiations with the City decision makers and their staff to save a 3-Acre parcel with a necessary portion of the building. To facilitate good faith negotiation and to meet the needs of the City and the Community, the Community reduced its need from 7.5 to as little as 1-Acre (with shared space) of the site - 6% of their 16+ Acres. Still no response from the decision makers. Negotiation requires a two-sided relationship. Where is the City?

EPIC hosted two huge community meetings at East Phillips Park in Nov. 2017 and Sept. 2018 with approximately 250 community members at each. Votes were taken at both as to those favoring the City's Water Works plan or the Community's Indoor Urban Farm Project. No one at either meeting voted in favor of any of the City plans. They nearly unanimously favored the 3-Acre Community Plan (two votes at the 2017 meeting went for increasing the size of the Community plan to include the entire 7 ½-Acres). It must be noted that a presentation of the Community plan was not included on the City's agenda or permitted at the 2018 meeting nor was it permitted at the subsequent City Council meetings listed below. So much for community engagement! We'll see what happens at the newly formed HAC meeting on APRIL 22<sup>nd</sup> at 3:00 P.M. at Hiawatha Public Works facility, 1901 E 26<sup>th</sup> St., Mpls., MN. Join Us!

**The Current Situation:** Under pressure, from Public Works staff, the City scheduled meetings with the Ways & Means Committee, Transportation & Public Works Committee, the Committee of the Whole, and the Full City Council and then rescheduled some, making notification of Urban Farm supporters difficult at best. Nevertheless, Urban Farm supporters filled the council chambers and overflowed in the hall at the T&PW Committee meeting in early December as a Native American Drum group performed a prayer and a request for understanding in the pre-meeting chamber. Chair Warsame moved the original motion, which would provide no space for the Urban Farm project and permit demolition of the entire Sears warehouse, through T&PW without a vote or recommendation to the full Council with the stated condition that it be modified to meet the needs of P.W. and the Community.

On Friday, Dec. 7<sup>th</sup> 2018, the full Council passed the bill, modified by C.M. Cano, which requires the formation of another Committee, this time called HAC (Hiawatha Advisory Committee), which will provide "feedback" on how to accommodate the needs of the community. C.M. Cano also included a statement prohibiting the demolition of the building without "input" from HAC. The City's Chief Financial Officer, Mark Ruff, interprets the bill as prohibiting any Community uses of the Roof Depot Site. The Bill also provides an extra \$950,000 for RSP, the Public Works Architect for "additional architectural and engineering design services" bringing RSP's total design budget at The Roof Depot site to nearly \$3 million to date. We find it interesting that Bob Friddle, Director of Facilities Design & Construction for Minneapolis was the Sr. Project Manager for RSP Architects.

After the demise of GAC, in direct contradiction of their own principals of Community Engagement, the City has never allowed the Community to present or speak at any of these meetings or decision-making sessions. The number one principal of Community Engagement states,

**“Right to be involved – Public participation is based on the belief that those who are affected by a decision have a right to be involved in the decision-making process”.** (Passed by Mpls. City Council in 2007 – updated in 2014)

There has been absolutely no effort by the City to understand, honor or even hear of the hard work of the community or abide by the principals of the Blueprint of Equitable Engagement endorsed by the City of Minneapolis. Nor has there been any acknowledgement that the East Phillips Indoor Urban Farm Project meets all the recommendations of the South Side Green Zone which includes East Phillips and is located in the Minneapolis Opportunity Zone.

With this frustrating disregard of those who live in this neighborhood and those who are directly affected by these decisions being foisted on this community by those who do not live here and whose children are not affected by their decisions, the community demands the following;

**We demand that the City Council and Staff seek an alternate site for the Water Yard, or**

- 1) **Immediately start meaningful negotiations with EPNI and the Community to return to our 3-acre option at the Roof Depot site** (see last page), and
- 2) **Immediately start working to move the other neighborhood polluters out of East Phillips – our people have suffered under the devastating effects of their negligence long enough.**

The East Phillips Community has a reputation for not taking ”NO” as an answer.

### **EPNI Board Members and Key Urban Farm Supporters**

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**The East Phillips Indoor Urban Farm Project is unanimously supported by the EPIC Board of Directors, the EPIC membership at numerous membership meetings and unanimously at two large community meetings (250+ attendees at each). The project is also supported by the Sierra Club, the Green Team, the Seward Co-op, over 400 individual signers on support petitions and many other organizations & individuals throughout the city. The project also meets every goal of the South Side Green Zone and is in the South Minneapolis Opportunity Zone.**

### **A note to our supporters:**

*Please contact the Mayor ([jacob.frey@minneapolismn.gov](mailto:jacob.frey@minneapolismn.gov)), the City Council members (all can be reached at [citycouncilmember@minneapolismn.gov](mailto:citycouncilmember@minneapolismn.gov)), the State Legislators and Federal Senators and Representatives and the Governor and **help us make the case for what is right**. In your calls insist on real community engagement and development instead of city sponsored increases in pollution and congestion which is in violation of the state’s Clark/Berglund Cumulative Pollution legislation. **Please CC your responses to [cpass@runbox.com](mailto:cpass@runbox.com)***

### **Follow the links below for articles & Videos on the East Phillips Indoor Urban Farm project;**

Alley 2018 #12 Residents Storm City Hall

<http://alleynews.org/2018/12/residents-storm-city-hall-to-protest/>

Alley 2018 #12 Analysis – Environmental Racism

<http://alleynews.org/2018/12/analysis-environmental-racism-degradation-not-new-to-phillips/>

StarTribune Nov. 28, 2017 – Neighborhood wants Aquaponics, Bike Shop, Jobs & Clean Air

<http://www.startribune.com/neighborhood-group-wants-aquaponics-farms-bike-shop-and-cafe-at-east-phillips-site/460628423/>

Minneapolis/St. Paul Business Journal – Cano “institutional racism.”

[https://www.bizjournals.com/twincities/blog/real\\_estate/2016/02/minneapolis-roof-depot-site-purchase-cano-racism.html](https://www.bizjournals.com/twincities/blog/real_estate/2016/02/minneapolis-roof-depot-site-purchase-cano-racism.html)

Longfellow – Nokomis Messenger 2016, June - Residents Fight City’s Plan

<http://www.longfellownokomismessenger.com/residents-fight-citys-plan-to-use-roof-depot-site-as-water-yard/>

Link to C.M. Cano’s “Staff Direction” 12/7/2018 (Paste to address Line)

<http://lms.minneapolismn.gov/Download/File/1950/Hiawatha%20Staff%20Direction%20FINAL%2012.7.18.pdf>

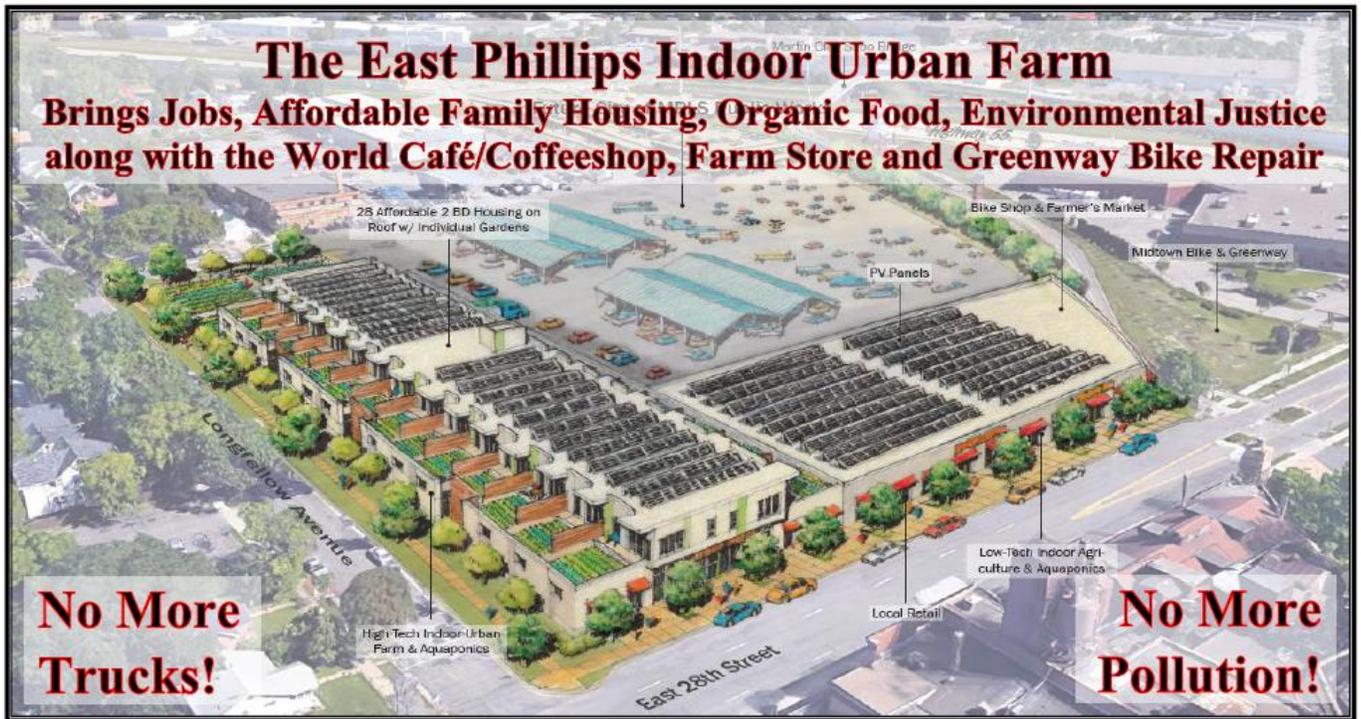
Link to Video of C.M. Cano’s presentation to the 12/7/2018 City Council Meeting RE Roof Depot

<https://photos.app.goo.gl/AsAAJnJx44wUMemf6>

Link to Video of Winona LaDuke Community Meeting w City Staff 11/20/2018

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0F2YkixIWx0>

This is the community's three-acre shared use plan.  
 It uses only 18% of the 16.4-acres of land owned by the City at the Hiawatha site.  
 The community would much prefer the entire 7.5-acre Roof Depot site which would allow;  
 many more living-wage jobs, more affordable housing, no more pollution and  
 one of the State's largest Solar arrays.



We Want Clean Water AND We Deserve to Breathe Too  
 Mpls. Must find a non-residential site from which to launch its daily Diesel Fleet and store its  
 fire-hydrants, man-hole covers and sewer pipes!

