

2619 E. Franklin Avenue  
Minneapolis, MN 55406  
March 8, 2023

Mayor Frey  
Room 331  
350 S. Fifth Street  
Minneapolis, MN 55415

Margaret Anderson Kelliher  
Director of Public Works  
Room 203  
350 S. Fifth Street  
Minneapolis, MN 55415

Dear Mayor Frey and Ms. Kelliher:

As the Board of the Seward Neighborhood Group (SNG), we are writing to you about our concerns regarding environmental degradation in East Phillips, but also in the western part of Seward, due to the expansion of the public works facility at the Roof Depot site at 1860 East 28th Street in East Phillips.

This site is on Dakota land. In light of the recent protest by indigenous people at the site on February 23, 2023, as well as numerous recent public letters opposing the project, and questions from our Seward residents, we find that we do not have enough information to reassure ourselves and our neighbors that this project will not increase negative environmental and health outcomes in the surrounding areas.

The Seward Neighborhood Group Board requests a meeting with the City to address our questions and concerns; the meeting we are envisioning would be open to the public and held as a hybrid of in-person and virtual attendance. We would like this to take place soon, preferably before the scheduled demolition of the Roof Depot site. Following are the key concerns and questions we would like addressed:

- 1) The Environmental Assessment Worksheet addressed “stationary” sources of pollution/contamination and provided specific mitigation plans (for example: contaminated soil, demolition, emissions from the facilities operation, etc) but did not seem to evaluate and address, in any detail, air quality related to the impact of the greatly increased volume of traffic (from City vehicles, staff vehicles, diesel trucks). The increase in diesel emissions is of particular concern because of the documented negative impacts on the health of those who are exposed to it.
  - a. We want to know the specifics of how much new traffic will occur and what the impact will be on air quality. How many diesel vehicles will be coming and going from the site and refueling there? If such studies haven’t been done, why not? If such studies exist, we would like to see them.
  - b. Diesel emissions are known to increase risk for asthma, heart disease, strokes, diabetes, and Alzheimer’s. In addition to pollution from emissions, a refueling station has other

pollution impacts beyond emissions. Vehicle-related pollution from tire and road particles and brake particles will also impact air quality. How is the City planning to mitigate those impacts?

- c. There has been mention of using more City electric vehicles as one form of mitigation. What is the time table for that? Is the plan for the City to purchase electric vehicles to replace gas/diesel fueled vehicles right from the start of the new facility opening; or is the plan for the City to replace current vehicles with electric vehicles as the old ones wear out (so over a much longer period of time).
- 2) Both East Phillips and parts of west Seward are part of the City-designated Southside Green Zone, indicating already existing areas of high pollution in particularly vulnerable communities. In west Seward, the Green Zone includes CommonBond's Cooperage residence for low-income elders, Touchstone Mental Health's residence for adults with severe and persistent mental illness, the affordable housing Wadaag Commons being developed by Seward ReDesign, and the most diverse and lowest wealth part of our neighborhood. Out of the 164 zip codes in the Twin Cities metro areas, the zip code that includes East Phillips and parts of western Seward (55404) has the 6th highest rate of asthma emergency department visits. We are concerned about the health impacts on our neighbors when any new pollutants are added to areas already burdened by poor air quality and other contaminants.

We are concerned that the Environmental Assessment Worksheet did not take into account the wider context of an already pollution-burdened community, instead focusing only on the impacts of the Public Works facility expansion itself. The Green Zone designation emphasizes how crucial it is to take this more holistic context into account when making policy and development decisions and indicates a commitment on the part of the City to make sure additional pollution harms are not added to those communities. We would like you to talk about the plans to expand the City Public Works Facility in light of the Green Zone commitments and goals made by the City.

- 3) Many people in Seward remember seeing the soil from neighbor's yards being removed and replaced because of arsenic contamination from the pesticide plant that was at the Roof Depot site; it is a reminder that air borne contaminants don't pay any attention to neighborhood boundaries. Concerns have been raised about how demolition of the Roof Depot building may spread more contamination.
- a. We would like information from the City about how arsenic will be contained during demolition to prevent new contamination airborne in East Phillips and Seward.
  - b. We would like the City to also address the potential spread of other harmful substances such as lead, asbestos, and other compounds found in older buildings. Does the Roof Depot building have construction materials that are now known as harmful? If so, what steps are being taken to prevent these from becoming airborne and traveling outside of the demolition site?

In closing, increasing environmental hazards and poor public health outcomes at the Hiawatha Expansion would perpetuate environmental racism that residents and several Neighborhood Groups and community organizations want to stop. Again, we would like the City of Minneapolis to hold a hybrid public/zoom meeting **before the scheduled demolition of the Roof Depot** to address our concerns.

Sincerely,

Lisa Boehlke, President

Tami Traeger, Vice-president

Mary Pumphrey, Board member

on behalf of the Seward Neighborhood Group

cc: Ward 1 Council Member, Elliott Payne

Ward 2 Council Member, Robin Wonsley

Ward 3 Council Member, Michael Rainville

Ward 4 Council Member, LaTrisha Vetaw

Ward 5 Council Member, Jeremiah Ellison

Ward 6 Council Member, Jamal Osman

Ward 7 Council Member, Lisa Goodman

Ward 8 Council Member, Andrea Jenkins

Ward 9 Council Member, Jason Chavez

Ward 10 Council Member, Aisha Chughtai

Ward 11 Council Member, Emily Koski

Ward 12 Council Member, Andrew Johnson