

Mayor negotiates \$6.7 million agreement for the residents of waterfront south with EMR

More than \$3.7 million dedicated to improving the lives of residents in a charitable fund

(Camden, NJ) – On Feb. 21, a vast four alarm fire at the EMR facility, located at the 1400 block of South Front Street, sent black smoke billowing into Camden City and could be seen from more than 15 miles away. Now, through the work of Mayor Victor Carstarphen and his administration, EMR will be allocating \$6.7 million to benefit the residents who live in the waterfront south neighborhood and the surrounding community. Based on the \$6.7 million pledge, \$4.5 million will be committed this calendar year and \$450,000 will be paid annually over next five years. In addition, funds will also be assigned to improving and enhancing the fire suppression system at EMR facility and reimbursing the city fire department from damages in battling the previous blaze.

“The agreement that my administration negotiated on behalf of the residents of waterfront south and the other adjacent neighborhoods provides meaningful compensation to the city’s waterfront south community, helps to safeguard against the threat of fire and outlines meaningful changes at its location,” said Camden Mayor Victor G. Carstarphen. “This \$4.5 million financial commitment in calendar year 2025 comes with an annual investment of \$450,000 per year over the next five years. I can assure our residents that EMR will be held to these commitments, and we can all agree that we need to eliminate fires from this site.”

Since the day of the fire, city leadership and their counterparts at all levels of government have been working to make the neighborhood whole following the blaze that dislodged more than 100 families from the neighboring community. This agreement will be memorialized in writing within 45 days of this announcement. The byproduct of the Mayor Carstarphen’s negotiations includes changes to the operation of the EMR facility by reducing its overall footprint throughout the city by nine acres, increasing inspections of material being brought on to the site, limiting the material to be stored on site and reducing the height of shredding piles. It also includes investment into the facility to be more neighborhood friendly with bio-diversity walls and investments into aesthetics. Furthermore, EMR will install an aerial fire suppression system that will include heat detection cameras to immediately identify and focus cooling water jets on potential hot spots. This suppression system will be certified by fire safety experts.

“The February fire was a wake-up call. It forced more than 100 families out of their homes and put our entire neighborhood at risk. Since day one, we’ve demanded accountability and real investment—not just words or promises. This agreement is a direct result of pressure from the community and from us. It includes serious dollars, serious changes, and is a clear signal that EMR is being held accountable because people refused to stay silent,” said Carlos Morales, executive director of the Heart of Camden in the waterfront south neighborhood. “We will ensure that representatives of EMR meet directly with waterfront south residents to explain these investments and the improvements required to make sure this never happens again. We thank Mayor Victor Carstarphen for leading this effort with urgency, clarity, and an unwavering tone. His message was consistent from the start: this would not be ignored. Heart of Camden will continue to work with the city to make sure everything is communicated clearly to waterfront south residents.”

One of the landmark institutions, Sacred Heart in the center of waterfront south, has been a beacon for residents. Pastor of the parish, Father Vincent Guest, has been an advocate of the community and discussed the agreement.

“I remember so well the afternoon of the fire, as smoke just a few blocks from our church billowed high into the sky,” Guest said. “I went into Sacred Heart Church and prayed for the safety of the fire fighters, first responders and our neighborhood. This investment is a significant step to ensure the safety of our community.”

Moving forward and most importantly, EMR will be working with stakeholders in the waterfront south neighborhood to invest over a \$3 million dollars into the community. This commitment will be based upon recommendations of a working group established to advise EMR. Also, they will be developing a text notification system directly with residents and conducting an annual open house for community leaders. In addition, EMR will be investing money into neighborhood cleanups throughout waterfront south and other surrounding areas.

“The fire our first responders and all of the support personnel had to fight on Feb. 21 will not be forgotten for its scope and magnitude,” said Commissioner Director Louis Cappelli Jr. “That said, I believe the mayor and his team have made some real progress in assisting residents and ensuring that a fire this size never happens at EMR again.”

Regarding the Camden City Fire Department, EMR has agreed to run up to four full-scale fire drills a year with community leader participation, an annual office of emergency management planning event and ensure on site water tanks provide connectivity for the fire department. These operational changes will be mandated for perpetuity.

“I applaud the Mayor and his Administration for following through and negotiating this agreement with EMR,” said Camden City Council President Angel Fuentes. “It was a terrible event, and a fire of that magnitude should never occur again. I feel EMR has responded appropriately by making this investment and agreeing to make these operational changes.”

This public-private partnership will be memorialized through a memorandum of understanding between Mayor Carstarphen, City Council and EMR.

“This is real progress for those families who were impacted the most,” said City Camden Council Vice President Arthur Barclay. “As Ward 1 Councilperson, I fight every day for an improved quality of life for our community. I am encouraged by EMR’s efforts to make our residents whole. This is a positive step forward and an investment in the long-term health and safety of the Waterfront South neighborhood.”

All fire suppression work being done at the EMR facility will also be certified by a fire safety engineer and reviewed by the Camden City Fire Marshall and Department.

Assemblyman William Moen from the 5th legislative district has introduced a series of bill because of the fire.

“February’s industrial fire was a wake-up call, underscoring the urgent need to prioritize public safety, corporate accountability, and environmental justice,” Moen said. “I commend the City of Camden for acting swiftly to secure this multi-million-dollar commitment from EMR. This is certainly a step in the right direction. In parallel, I’ve introduced several pieces of legislation designed to hold corporations accountable and better protect communities across our state. This collaborative effort is a testament to the determination of our community leaders, advocates, and fellow elected officials who not only demanded change, but environmental justice.”

Jospeh Balzano, the CEO of EMR USA, talked about the importance of having an agreement with longevity.

“This MOU strengthens our commitment to the waterfront south neighborhood and underscores my dedication to keeping our site safe,” Balzano said. “This is a long-term agreement in partnership with the city to deliver positive change to residents of Camden who were adversely impacted by the fire on Feb. 21.”

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