



City of Chicago



R2015-70

Office of the City Clerk

Document Tracking Sheet

Meeting Date: 1/21/2015

Sponsor(s): Burke (14)

Type: Resolution

Title: Tribute extended to victims and survivors of capsizing of S.S. Eastland and call for approval of plan of review by committee for commemorative bronze artwork to be positioned along south bank of Riverwalk on 100th year commemoration

Committee(s) Assignment:

RESOLUTION

WHEREAS, July 24, 2015 officially marks the 100th Anniversary of the capsizing of the S.S. Eastland, a passenger excursion boat that overturned on the south bank of the Chicago River between the Clark Street Bridge and the LaSalle Street Bridge, killing 844 passengers and 72 crew members including 26 complete families, 290 children; and

WHEREAS, The Chicago City Council has been informed of this milestone by Alderman Edward M. Burke; and

WHEREAS, The victims of this tragedy were family members and employees of the Western Electric Hawthorne Works in Cicero, Illinois about to embark on a day-long company outing to Michigan City, Indiana where an annual picnic was to be held; and

WHEREAS, Design flaws making the steam ship susceptible to listing were detected not long after the craft was commissioned by the Jenks Ship Building Company of Port Huron, Michigan in 1903; and

WHEREAS, The likely mishandling of the water ballast system of this over-crowded vessel and other contributing factors, caused the Eastland to list dangerously to the port side before capsizing; and

WHEREAS, The resulting disaster represents the largest loss of life on the Great Lakes from a single maritime incident; and

WHEREAS, From the \$50,000 settlement of a civil lawsuit and claims filed by creditors in the aftermath of the tragedy, there was no money left over to compensate the families of survivors; and

WHEREAS, Until 1988, there had never before been an official monument, signage, or similar historical remembrance authorized by the City of Chicago; and

WHEREAS, The Committee on Streets and Alleys, upon receiving a proposed order from the Commissioner of Public Works recommending installation of a marker conceived by students of the Illinois Mathematics & Sciences Academy in Aurora and the Illinois State Historical Preservation Society, granted permission; and

WHEREAS, Upon the motion of Alderman Patrick Levar to the Chicago City Council on December 14, 1988, installation of the signage was approved; and

WHEREAS, The commemorative plaque was placed near the proximate location at the water level on Wacker Drive on June 4, 1989; and

WHEREAS, The plaque was dislodged from its anchoring post and reported stolen on April 26, 2000; and

WHEREAS, A replacement marker was installed and re-dedicated on July 24, 2003, on the street level of Wacker Drive, however, the second marker is somewhat inconspicuous and positioned high above the actual location of the tragedy; and

WHEREAS, The Eastland Memorial Society, formed in March of 1998 for the sole purpose of memorializing the passengers and rescuers of the disaster, has for years sought to design and fund a larger, more comprehensive memorial but has met with little success; and

WHEREAS, David Nelson, a private citizen and grandson of Eastland rescue worker Elmer Nelson has devoted the last 42 years of his life to educating the public and generations of students about this tragedy through public presentations for the sole purpose of keeping the event alive in public memory; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Nelson has engaged noted Chicago sculptor Oscar León to design a symbolic bronze memorial and bas relief wall to honor the memory of the victims and their families, and proposes a targeted installation date prior to July 24, 2015 along the south bank of the Riverwalk; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Nelson has reached out to corporations, foundations and individuals to fund the projected \$500,000 cost of the creation and installation of a memorial with six bronze components through private donation; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Nelson strongly believes the success of forming public-private partnerships to finance the venture is contingent upon the endorsement of the Chicago City Council; therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED, That we, the Mayor and the members of the Chicago City Council assembled this twenty-first day of January, 2015, in order to pay proper tribute to the victims and survivors, do hereby call for approval of a plan of review by committee for commemorative bronze artwork to be positioned along the south bank of the Riverwalk for formal unveiling on or about the centenary of this event.

Alderman Edward M. Burke
Alderman, 14th Ward