

COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA
COMMITTEE ON RULES

Room 400, City Hall
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Tuesday, September 20, 2011
10:10 a.m.

PRESENT:

COUNCILMAN JAMES KENNEY, CHAIR
COUNCILMAN DARRELL CLARKE
COUNCILMAN FRANK DiCICCO
COUNCILMAN W. WILSON GOODE, JR.
COUNCILMAN WILLIAM K. GREENLEE
COUNCILWOMAN DONNA REED MILLER
COUNCILWOMAN BLONDELL REYNOLDS BROWN
COUNCILMAN FRANK RIZZO, JR.

BILL 110307 - An ordinance establishing a
neighborhood improvement district in an area
that generally includes, with the exception of
those properties having frontage on north
Broad Street, the area bounded by the
northeast corner of Broad and Vine streets,
the southeast corner of Broad and Spring
Garden streets, the southwest corner of 8th
and Spring Garden streets, the northwest
corner of 8th and Vine streets and the
northeast corner of Broad and Vine streets...

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1
2 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: Good
3 morning. We have a quorum of the Rules
4 Committee today with Councilmembers
5 Goode, DiCicco, Greenlee, Miller and
6 Councilman Kenney, myself, chairing the
7 Committee.

8 Today we will take testimony
9 and have a public meeting on one bill,
10 which is Bill No. 110370, which is an
11 ordinance establishing a neighborhood
12 improvement district in an area that
13 generally includes, with the exception of
14 those properties having frontage on north
15 Broad Street, the area bounded by the
16 northeast corner of Broad and Vine
17 streets, the southeast corner of Broad
18 and Spring Garden streets, the southwest
19 corner of 8th and Spring Garden streets,
20 the northwest corner of 8th and Vine
21 streets and the northeast corner of Broad
22 and Vine streets and certain blocks of
23 intersecting streets, within such area,
24 to be known as the Callowhill Reading
25 Viaduct Neighborhood Improvement

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2 District, and for which Callowhill
3 Reading Viaduct Neighborhood Improvement
4 District, Incorporated, a Pennsylvania
5 non-profit corporation, would serve as
6 the Neighborhood Improvement District
7 Management Association; approving a plan
8 for the District, including a list of
9 proposed improvements and their estimated
10 cost, and providing for assessment fees
11 to be levied on property owners within
12 the District; authorizing the Director of
13 Commerce, on behalf of the City, to
14 execute an agreement with Callowhill
15 Reading Viaduct Neighborhood Improvement
16 District relating to the District; and
17 authorizing Callowhill Reading Viaduct
18 Neighborhood Improvement District to
19 assess property owners within the
20 District a special property assessment
21 fee to be used in accordance with the
22 approved plan; all in accordance with the
23 provisions of the Community and Economic
24 Improvement Act, all under certain terms
25 and conditions.

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2 The Chair recognizes Councilman
3 DiCicco for initial remarks.

4 COUNCILMAN DiCICCO: Thank you,
5 Mr. Chair, and good morning, everyone.
6 After a number of conversations with
7 individuals of the Callowhill Loft
8 District and a conversation I had about a
9 week or two ago, I believe, with
10 Mr. Chin -- I don't remember exactly when
11 it was -- it is very obvious that there
12 are a certain group of people who do not
13 want new taxes, as the signs are saying,
14 and do not want to be included in this
15 NID district, in the NID.

16 I think for your future, you're
17 making a mistake by wanting to opt out.
18 That is a choice that you are making.
19 Having spoken with Sarah McEneaney and
20 John Struble, who represent -- or two of
21 the representatives from the Callowhill
22 District, we will be amending this bill,
23 drawing a new boundary that will include
24 the bulk of the Vine Street Callowhill
25 District and excluding that area which is

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2 more commonly referred to as the
3 Chinatown community, for lack of a better
4 description. I will be having a map.
5 And it's my understanding that speaking
6 to those two folks that the revenues that
7 may be lost as a result of downsizing the
8 boundaries of the District will not
9 impact negatively on what the purpose of
10 the NID is all about going forward.

11 So we will proceed with
12 testimony. The Chair will call witnesses
13 up. So I just want to let those folks
14 primarily on the left, who are
15 complaining about possibly having
16 increase in their real estate tax, that
17 you won't have anything to worry about,
18 but as I leave here in about another
19 80-something days and a new District
20 Councilperson comes in, I can guarantee
21 you as this NID begins to take hold and
22 progress starts to develop, the folks on
23 my left are going to be asking for why
24 are we not getting our streets cleaned,
25 why are we not getting lighting, why are

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2 we not getting some of the benefits that
3 our neighbors to the west are getting. I
4 guarantee you that will happen in the
5 next two years.

6 (Audience members shouting
7 out.)

8 COUNCILMAN DiCICCO: No, no,
9 no.

10 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: Excuse me.
11 Excuse me. This is not a sports arena.

12 COUNCILMAN DiCICCO: For those
13 of you who are not --

14 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: Excuse me.
15 You're not going to be shouting out and
16 interrupting this proceeding. The
17 Councilman has said that the people who
18 are here who are opposed to the bill are
19 for the most part, if not all part, being
20 taken out of it. So I don't see where
21 there's any further conflict when the
22 folks --

23 (Audience members shouting
24 out.)

25 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: When you

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2 have a chance to testify, you can say
3 it's not true, but what I'm saying for
4 the record now is that it's clear from
5 his statement that the people who are
6 opposed to this bill are being removed
7 from it. So I don't continue to
8 understand where the conflict rises, and
9 if anyone would choose not to testify as
10 a result of being removed from the
11 process or from the bill, that would be
12 fine, too. But what I don't want to see
13 happen is the people on the list come up
14 here and testify that they are opposed to
15 something that's already been fixed,
16 because you're not going to be included
17 in the bill.

18 So this is not a gripe session.
19 This is a hearing to get a bill out of
20 committee, and the bill will be amended
21 accordingly.

22 Before we go further, I'd like
23 to recognize the fact that Councilman
24 Rizzo is also in attendance today.

25 Councilman, do you have

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2 anything else or should we start the
3 witness list?

4 COUNCILMAN DiCICCO: That's
5 fine. Thank you.

6 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: Thank you
7 very much.

8 Alan Greenberger, please.

9 (Witness approached witness
10 table.)

11 MR. GREENBERGER: Good morning,
12 Mr. Chairman and members of Council. My
13 name is Alan Greenberger and I'm Deputy
14 Mayor for Economic Development and
15 Director of Commerce. I'm here today to
16 provide testimony in support of Bill No.
17 110307. This bill will allow for the
18 approval of the establishment of the
19 Neighborhood Improvement District in the
20 community between Vine and Spring Garden
21 Streets and 8th Street and Broad Street.
22 I understand that is what's been amended.

23 The creation of a Neighborhood
24 Improvement District, referred to as
25 NIDs, is consistent with the City's

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2 Strategic Plan, particularly with regard
3 to the core principles of healthy and
4 sustainable communities. NIDs strengthen
5 communities through cleaning,
6 beautification, public safety and
7 marketing activities. A number of people
8 are here today to testify on the proposed
9 bill. Since NIDs work best when a broad
10 majority of the assessed property owners
11 understand and support the NID's revenue
12 and service plans, it's important to
13 clarify two aspects of this proposal
14 prior to their testimony that have
15 resulted in some confusion and concern.

16 First, the NID is one element
17 of an overall strategy to manage and plan
18 for growth of an area that we believe is
19 poised for significant positive changes
20 in the coming years. This strategy
21 includes development of a neighborhood
22 plan, identification of City-owned
23 property that can support affordable
24 housing and the redevelopment of the
25 Reading Viaduct area.

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2 Second, resources of the NID,
3 as outlined in the plan and budget, will
4 not -- and I emphasize will not -- be
5 used for the redevelopment, programming
6 or administration of any reuse of the
7 Reading Viaduct. However, the Viaduct in
8 its current condition is a blighting
9 influence in the neighborhood, and one
10 impetus behind the NID is to remove the
11 significant amount of trash and graffiti
12 attracted by this abandoned structure.
13 But the NID will also provide cleaning
14 and other enhancement services to all
15 properties throughout the proposed
16 district, including commercial and
17 industrial properties, row houses,
18 apartments, condominiums and any
19 affordable housing development built in
20 the neighborhood.

21 The City's support of this NID
22 has been conditioned upon several changes
23 in the NID's structure that have been
24 agreed to by the proponents of the NID.
25 These include consideration by all

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2 parties in the current boundaries of the
3 NID to changing the name of NID, changing
4 the vision statement of the NID to remove
5 references to supporting the
6 redevelopment of the Reading Viaduct and
7 ensuring that the entity's governing
8 board fully represents the diversity of
9 property and businessowners found within
10 the NID.

11 In its initial plan, this NID
12 is only about providing cleaning and
13 other services that are beyond the City's
14 capacity for the benefit of a dynamic,
15 diverse and growing community. If in the
16 future the Reading Viaduct is improved
17 and the property owners and the City
18 agree through a new plan and budget that
19 the NID assist with maintenance of the
20 viaduct, that is always a possibility.
21 But that will require a new public
22 approval process. Today's proposed NID
23 is about maintaining the sidewalks and
24 public spaces at street level.

25 This bill will authorize an

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2 assessment rate of approximately 7
3 percent of current real estate taxes for
4 property owners in the boundaries of the
5 NID, yielding an expected 246-plus
6 thousand dollars per year for five years.
7 The proposed first-year services include,
8 one, a one-time comprehensive cleaning
9 throughout the entire area, graffiti
10 removal and removal of short dumps.
11 Regular weekly cleaning services to the
12 NID area are projected to commence
13 following the comprehensive cleaning
14 program. Sixty percent of the NID's
15 budget supports these area cleaning
16 services.

17 Two, planning activities and
18 physical improvements to the District
19 area to enhance the physical environment.
20 Such projects may include planning
21 studies, lighting improvements, signage
22 and additional street trees.

23 Three, marketing activities and
24 programs in support of the NID's
25 organizational mission, which is to

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2 transform the public space between Vine
3 and Spring Garden, 8th Street and Broad
4 into a cleaner, safer, greener
5 neighborhood.

6 I urge you to support Bill No.
7 110307. Thank you for your
8 consideration, and I'll be happy to
9 answer any questions.

10 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: Any
11 questions for Mr. Greenberger?

12 (No response.)

13 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: Thank you
14 very much for your testimony.

15 MR. GREENBERGER: Thank you,
16 sir.

17 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: Sarah
18 McEneaney, John Struble, Michelle Liao
19 and Paul Levy.

20 Is Paul Levy here?

21 (No response.)

22 (Witnesses approached witness
23 table.)

24 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: Good
25 morning.

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2 MS. McENEANEY: Good morning.

3 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: Please
4 identify yourself for the record.

5 MS. McENEANEY: Good morning,
6 Mr. Chairman and members of City Council.
7 My name is Sarah McEneaney. I'm a
8 self-employed artist, and since 1979, I
9 have lived and worked at 1115 Hamilton
10 Street in the Callowhill industrial area
11 just north of Center City. It's a very
12 diverse neighborhood, from the makeup of
13 the people who live and work there, to
14 the street grid bisected by Ridge Avenue
15 and the abandoned Reading Viaduct and in
16 the beautiful 19th Century industrial
17 architecture. I am also a founding
18 member of Callowhill Neighborhood
19 Association, which was formed in 2001.
20 We are actively involved in zoning and
21 preservation issues, and we have
22 neighborhood clean-ups twice a year. But
23 it's not enough. We need a Neighborhood
24 Improvement District. We care deeply
25 about our neighborhood and we want to

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2 make it cleaner, safer and greener.

3 The process began just over a
4 year ago and outreach to all our
5 neighbors has been the major concern. We
6 are a 100 percent volunteer group of
7 residents, businesses and property
8 owners. After a couple informal
9 meetings, we organized two town hall
10 style meetings that were held on October
11 7th and December 16th of 2010. Paul Levy
12 presented a feasibility study of the area
13 at both meetings, and Councilman Frank
14 DiCicco explained the process of forming
15 a NID at the December meeting. Both were
16 well attended by a diverse group of
17 residents, businesses and non-profits,
18 including Asian Americans United, Asian
19 Arts Initiative, Callowhill Neighborhood
20 Association, Folk Arts and Cultural
21 Treasures Charter School, who hosted the
22 meeting, Philadelphia Chinatown
23 Development Corporation, Sunday Breakfast
24 Association and Reading Viaduct Project.
25 Biweekly NID Steering Committee meetings

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2 began in January 2011. They are and will
3 continue to be open to everyone in the
4 community.

5 The focus of the work is
6 outreach. A tri-fold flyer was designed
7 and produced and from mid March to mid
8 April was delivered door to door and by
9 mail throughout the neighborhood. A
10 website with Chinese and Spanish
11 translations was designed and launched.
12 Our website has email and phone contact
13 capabilities.

14 In addition to widely
15 distributed emails, the Steering
16 Committee has consistently reached out
17 personally to community members, inviting
18 them to get involved in the NID formation
19 process. We have continually stressed
20 that this is a working process and that
21 we want everyone in the proposed
22 boundaries to be involved. We have
23 repeatedly stated in meetings and in
24 follow-up emails that the ordinance is
25 open to change and have listed the name

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2 of the NID, the boundaries of the NID, an
3 affordable assessment and budget
4 accountability as issues we are open to
5 working on with our neighbors. We have
6 even met with an independent mediator in
7 an effort to keep communication going
8 forward. We continue to believe we would
9 have a stronger and more effective NID
10 with the participation of all members of
11 the community and continue to work
12 towards that goal.

13 Detailed documentation of our
14 outreach efforts is included in the
15 packets that each of you have.

16 I respectfully ask you to look
17 over the information in the packets. We
18 have done research on our neighborhood's
19 history and on improvement districts.
20 Both John Struble and myself have been
21 attending Drexel University's BID/NID
22 Certification Program. But, most
23 importantly, we have done extensive
24 outreach and have broad support
25 throughout the neighborhood. We

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2 currently have about 100 letters of
3 support, and more arrive every day.

4 We know there is opposition.

5 We have been and are still willing to sit
6 down with anyone in the community in an
7 effort to clear up misunderstandings of
8 the ordinance and create a productive and
9 effective NID that represents our diverse
10 community.

11 When you look at the photos,
12 which we also made large that are in your
13 packet, it's easy to see why we need a
14 NID. Please support our efforts and help
15 us create a Neighborhood Improvement
16 District.

17 Thank you.

18 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: Thank you
19 for your testimony.

20 Please identify yourself for
21 the record.

22 MS. LIAO: I am Michelle Liao.
23 I live on 310 North 11th Street. I have
24 a very simple testimony.

25 My hope for our neighborhood

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2 for CRVNID is that I want to take strolls
3 in the evenings to feel the fresh air and
4 the breeze and not to be worried about my
5 safety. And I want to see kids playing
6 and laughing and full of joy. I want to
7 wander into the neighborhood restaurant
8 around the corner and have a nice bowl of
9 noodles. I want to see people walking to
10 work under trees that's covered with buds
11 in the springtime. I want to see flower
12 boxes on the sidewalks instead of piles
13 of trash. I want to see a variety of
14 businesses set up shop and all doing
15 wonderfully well. I want to see studios
16 and galleries full of fine work and they
17 are selling. I want to see artist work
18 that's sprout out everywhere. I want to
19 see well-lighted streets with pedestrian
20 and cyclist at leisure. I want to see
21 small patches of garden, vegetable and
22 flowers here and there. But mostly I
23 want to see all the neighbors, especially
24 our Chinese neighbors, working together
25 for a safe, clean, vibrant and our unique

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2 neighborhood.

3 Thank you.

4 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: Thank you
5 very much for your testimony.

6 Sir, please identify yourself
7 for the record.

8 MR. STRUBLE: My name is John
9 Struble.

10 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: John, could
11 you do me a favor and pull the microphone
12 close to you. Thank you.

13 MR. STRUBLE: My name is John
14 Struble. I live and work at 310 North
15 11th Street. I am here to support Bill
16 No. 110307.

17 I have lived in this
18 neighborhood for about 14 years and I've
19 seen it go through considerable changes,
20 and I would like to see it now become the
21 next improvement district in the City of
22 Philadelphia.

23 There are presently 14
24 improvement districts in Philadelphia in
25 various neighborhoods and in extremely

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2 different demographics. There's almost
3 700 in the United States. Some of them
4 assess only businesses; others assess
5 business as well as residential
6 properties.

7 In Philadelphia, the largest is
8 the Center City District, with more than
9 4,500 properties taxed that creates a
10 budget of almost \$15 million to be spent
11 each year. The smallest is in Port
12 Richmond, with only 76 properties.

13 We have about 550 properties
14 that would give us almost \$250,000 to
15 spend in our neighborhood each year for
16 the next five years. After five years, a
17 sunset provision applies and we must then
18 ask -- come to you for reauthorization.

19 What is common about all these
20 districts is that the money is spent only
21 within the boundaries of the district.
22 Nobody likes taxes, but this is local
23 taxation at its very best and with direct
24 representation. Each improvement
25 district has its own management

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2 association whose makeup is determined by
3 the neighbors. This is overseen by a
4 Board of Directors, and each year the
5 budget gets audited by the Commerce
6 Department.

7 We have done a lot of work and
8 outreach for this initiative. If we fell
9 short in any way, it's not because we did
10 not try to reach everybody.

11 However, we are now beginning a
12 process where those who want to see
13 changes in the bill can come and step up
14 and be part of that process. This will
15 make our neighborhood much cleaner,
16 greener and more secure and with a
17 brighter future.

18 Thank you.

19 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: Thank you
20 for your testimony.

21 Mr. Levy, could you please take
22 a chair.

23 MR. LEVY: I have additional
24 copies of my testimony here as well.

25 Good morning. My name is Paul

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2 Levy. I'm President of the Center City
3 District and I'm pleased to offer my
4 support for the creation of a
5 Neighborhood Improvement District in the
6 area that can serve the very mixed-use
7 community roughly bounded by Broad, 8th
8 Street, Spring Garden to South Street.

9 Today, you will hear much
10 discussion about the appropriate name for
11 the area, about affordable housing and
12 market-rate housing, and what should be
13 done with the derelict Reading Viaduct
14 that runs through this area. All of
15 these are important issues that need to
16 be debated. But today's question is very
17 simple: Can a neighborhood be successful
18 if it's covered with litter and graffiti,
19 if it's the site for illegal dumping and
20 if dark underpasses create a sense of
21 danger? If you are in favor of dirty,
22 dangerous and dark, then don't support
23 the Neighborhood Improvement District.

24 But if you believe that dozens
25 of other business improvement districts

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2 and special service districts that you
3 have authorized in neighborhoods across
4 the City over the last 20 years have made
5 a difference, then vote yes to enable the
6 residents and businesses of this
7 neighborhood to create their own NID.

8 If you believe that in times of
9 scarcity government doesn't always have
10 enough resources to solve every problem,
11 then vote yes to enable this community to
12 contribute their own resources to this
13 proven mechanism of neighborhood
14 self-help.

15 This neighborhood does not
16 belong to the Callowhill residents. It
17 doesn't belong to Chinatown. The
18 neighborhood doesn't belong to just
19 businesses. It doesn't belong to just
20 residents. This is a very diverse
21 community that belongs to all of them
22 together. The group that planned the
23 Neighborhood Improvement District is
24 quite diverse in makeup, and they made
25 special efforts to reach out in multiple

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2 languages and hold multiple meetings.

3 As the City Planning Commission
4 works with the community on a plan for
5 the future, there will be plenty of room
6 for more market-rate housing and for more
7 affordable housing. There's a lot of
8 vacant land and empty property in this
9 neighborhood. There will be room for
10 more residents and more businesses. But
11 none of it will happen if they don't
12 start with the basics, making the place
13 clean and safe. I urge you to support
14 the NID.

15 Thank you very much.

16 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: Thank you
17 for your testimony.

18 Councilman Greenlee.

19 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Thank
20 you, Mr. Chairman.

21 Mr. Levy, just a quick
22 question. You kind of allude to it here,
23 but obviously you have a lot of
24 experience with the NIDs and the BIDs.
25 After these districts have been in place

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2 for a certain amount of years, what have
3 you found the reaction of the residents
4 and the businesses in the area once that
5 has been established? I guess
6 particularly maybe some of those people
7 who had concerns about it to start with.

8 MR. LEVY: Well, I think our
9 history is illustrative. This Council
10 approved our district in 1990 and 1991.
11 We had 12 percent of the property owners
12 object to the creation of the Center City
13 District. When we reauthorized it in
14 1994, we had 1 percent object, and in
15 each subsequent reauthorization, we've
16 had less than five properties out of
17 4,000 object. Every district, save one,
18 which had some major problems, has been
19 reauthorized in this city.

20 Obviously people first react
21 and say, Wait a minute, I don't want to
22 pay more. It's a normal reaction. It
23 happens every time. But when people
24 understand that these resources are
25 resources that they control, that they

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2 direct what happens to them and that
3 these resources have an immediate effect
4 on the public environment, the support
5 for these has been enormous.

6 Just to amend John's number,
7 there's now 1,000 of these in the United
8 States, 14 here, another 24 across
9 Pennsylvania. This is a tried and true
10 method of public and private cooperation.

11 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Thank
12 you.

13 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: Mr. Levy,
14 what was the one that wasn't
15 reauthorized?

16 MR. LEVY: I believe Kensington
17 went through a period of time where they
18 suspended, but then they have restarted.

19 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: So they're
20 back on?

21 MR. LEVY: They're back on,
22 yes, but they suspended for a period of
23 time.

24 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: Thank you
25 very much.

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2 Any other questions for

3 Mr. Levy?

4 (No response.)

5 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: Thank you

6 very much.

7 MR. LEVY: Thank you.

8 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: Let the

9 record reflect that Councilmembers Clarke

10 and Blondell Reynolds Brown are both in

11 attendance.

12 Amy Hooper, Matthew Pestronk

13 and Robert Cheetham.

14 (Witnesses approached witness

15 table.)

16 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: Please

17 identify yourself for the record.

18 MS. HOOPER: My name is Amy

19 Hooper. I would like to begin my

20 testimony by thanking Councilman Frank

21 DiCicco for his many years of support of

22 the Callowhill community and the

23 Chinatown community, as well as for many

24 years of public service to our city. We

25 couldn't have gotten to this point

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2 without you, and deep-hearted thanks.

3 I'm here today to ask
4 Councilman DiCicco and all of the members
5 of City Council to support the creation
6 of the Callowhill Reading Viaduct
7 Neighborhood Improvement District, or
8 CRVNID, with boundaries between Vine and
9 Spring Garden, 8th and Broad.

10 I just want to say that this
11 testimony was written before Councilman
12 DiCicco's announcement that there would
13 be a slight amendment to the boundaries.

14 Twenty years ago I moved to
15 1238 Callowhill Street. Although some of
16 my friends and family questioned my
17 decision to live in an industrial area of
18 the City that was sparsely populated, I
19 knew I found my place among a community
20 of urban pioneers. Since then, I have
21 become a community activist, working with
22 my neighbors and community leaders, like
23 many of you, to build a safe and clean,
24 vibrant community while preserving its
25 historic architecture. I'm a founding

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2 member of Callowhill Neighborhood
3 Association and I am the current
4 President.

5 Today, the Callowhill community
6 has become a home for artists, galleries,
7 dance studios, community gardens, social
8 service organizations, entrepreneurs and
9 businessowners, schools, restaurants, as
10 well as a place for families to raise
11 children. It has been an amazing
12 transformation to participate in.

13 For more than a decade,
14 Callowhill Neighborhood Association, its
15 volunteer Board and members have worked
16 diligently to improve the quality of life
17 for all residents, businessowners and
18 visitors to our neighborhood. We have
19 successfully collaborated with other
20 neighborhood organizations by holding
21 biannual clean-ups, tree plantings,
22 building award-winning community gardens
23 and organizing town watch patrols.
24 However, these volunteer efforts alone
25 are not enough, and they're not enough to

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2 combat the constant trash dumping and
3 neglected vacant parcels of land in our
4 community.

5 The creation of a Neighborhood
6 Improvement District will improve our
7 quality of life and strengthen property
8 values. By bringing neighborhoods and
9 businesses together, I believe we can
10 attract economic investment and
11 development that will invite more retail
12 and restaurants to further enhance our
13 neighborhood. In addition, improving the
14 quality of life for our community will
15 act as a catalyst for urban renewal for
16 our neighborhood communities and for the
17 City as a whole. We have an opportunity.

18 There have been concerns among
19 some of the members of the community that
20 the direct cost related to the NID to
21 individual residents will be
22 unaffordable. Here are some examples of
23 costs for residents based on the OPA
24 taxes paid. I'll use myself as the first
25 example.

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2 My estimated property tax for
3 2011 is \$1,845.46. My cost would be that
4 number times 7 percent, which equals
5 \$129.18 per year, or 35 cents per day.

6 Based on 2010 taxes in the Hing
7 Wah Yuen housing development of 51 units
8 on the 300 blocks of North 8th and 9th
9 Streets, the average assessment per year
10 would be \$138, or 37 cents per day.

11 And although our neighborhood
12 doesn't have many row homes, if we use
13 the example of the 1200 block of
14 Buttonwood Street, the average yearly
15 estimate would be \$68 per year, or just
16 18 cents per day.

17 I look forward to building on
18 our community's successes as we continue
19 our work together to create a safer,
20 cleaner and greener environment for
21 everyone to enjoy. I urge you, all of
22 you, to support this exciting new
23 initiative, and I thank you.

24 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: Thank you
25 for your testimony. Please wait at the

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2 table in case there's any questions.

3 Please identify yourself for
4 the record and proceed.

5 MR. PESTRONK: My name is Matt
6 Pestronk. I'm the developer of the
7 Goldtex building at 12th and Pearl.

8 I'd like to speak to two points
9 as to why I'm in support of the formation
10 of the Neighborhood Improvement District.
11 First of all, I've seen it firsthand in
12 other parts of the City where we've been
13 involved in multi-family rental real
14 estate projects, specifically in Mount
15 Airy and Northwest Philadelphia, where
16 we've seen the impact of the NID be
17 absolutely incredible and improve the
18 quality of life for everyone. You know,
19 you see derelict properties become reborn
20 in the space of a year or two, and on
21 Germantown Avenue in Mount Airy, it was
22 incredibly compelling. In certain
23 stretches what happened was incredibly
24 compelling. In certain areas, it was
25 significantly more derelict, for lack of

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2 a better term, than the worst parts of
3 the worst, most dumped on, most
4 graffitied parts of Callowhill. And so
5 I've seen it just have a tremendous
6 impact firsthand and benefit the quality
7 of life of every person living in those
8 neighborhoods regardless of their
9 socioeconomic status.

10 As it relates to why I think it
11 would be such a positive improvement in
12 this neighborhood, we were attracted to
13 the building we bought and which we're in
14 the process of developing, which we hope
15 to start heavy construction on soon, by
16 the proximity of the neighborhood to
17 Center City. And we didn't really know
18 about all these passionate people that
19 had lived here that had done so much to
20 take the neighborhood sort of to the edge
21 of greatness. That's what -- it was like
22 sort of after we bought the building, we
23 just liked the location, it was so close
24 to Center City, I met Amy and everyone
25 else, and we were like -- our impression

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2 was, wow, this is sort of like you think
3 you made a good economic real estate
4 investment and then you have this added
5 bonus of the area is about to really
6 become significantly better. And what's
7 important to us is that the area is
8 appealing to a broad range of people and
9 of all socioeconomic levels, and it was
10 important to us in securing our zoning
11 variance when we were meeting with the
12 constituency groups in the neighborhood
13 that we heard what they said and
14 addressed their concerns in getting our
15 zoning variance. And basically we feel
16 like for the neighborhood to be
17 successful, it's got to be a safe, clean
18 place. For the neighborhood to be
19 successful and achieve its potential,
20 it's got to be a safe, clean place for
21 everyone, and candidly, the biggest --
22 the largest amount of daily traffic in
23 the neighborhood is children, and I
24 didn't really realize that until a few
25 days ago because of the schools, churches

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2 and day cares that are located within its
3 boundaries.

4 So to me, I think that the
5 formation of the NID to have a really
6 nice, clean, safe, physically stable
7 place for people to raise their families
8 would just be such a high return,
9 low-cost investment.

10 We've actually offered to pay
11 our assessment on our full -- the
12 assessment based on our full, unabated
13 real estate taxes as a notion of we're
14 really in support of this project. So I
15 think that it's going to be an
16 outstanding thing for the neighborhood.

17 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: Thank you
18 for your testimony.

19 Please identify yourself for
20 the record.

21 MR. CHEETHAM: My name is
22 Robert Cheetham. I have a business at
23 340 North 12th Street.

24 Good morning, and thank you for
25 offering this opportunity to provide

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2 feedback regarding the proposed
3 Neighborhood Improvement District.

4 My name is Robert Cheetham.

5 I'm originally from the Midwest. I
6 didn't grow up here in Philadelphia.

7 After living overseas for several years,
8 I came to Philadelphia in 1994 as a
9 graduate student in the School of Design
10 at the University of Pennsylvania.

11 Following graduation, I worked for the
12 Philadelphia Police Department and then
13 for what is now known as the Office of
14 Innovation and Technology. After working
15 there for several years, I started my own
16 business, a software business called
17 Azavea, in 2000. I started the business
18 working out of my own apartment in the
19 Spring Garden neighborhood, and as we
20 grew and hired our first person, we
21 opened an office in the Callowhill
22 neighborhood in 2002. Over the past nine
23 years, Azavea has grown from one person
24 to 32 people, most of whom work in this
25 original office in Callowhill.

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2 Despite the high taxes,
3 Philadelphia has been good to my company.
4 Many of our products began with ideas
5 generated in this office and
6 organizations here in Philadelphia and
7 later sold to people all around the
8 United States. During this time, we have
9 watched this neighborhood change and grow
10 in some positive ways, but while it is a
11 relatively safe neighborhood with an
12 outstanding location adjacent to Center
13 City, the neighborhood continues to
14 struggle with trash, graffiti and other
15 quality-of-life concerns.

16 We want to continue to keep and
17 grow our business in Philadelphia and the
18 Callowhill neighborhood, but these are
19 real and significant issues. But I
20 believe they are solvable. As a business
21 located in this area, I welcome the idea
22 of creating a safer, cleaner and greener
23 environment for everyone to enjoy. I
24 feel that while it will raise property
25 taxes, the proposed NID will enable us to

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2 improve our quality of life, strengthen
3 property values and make the neighborhood
4 more attractive to residents and
5 businesses, and it will do so in a manner
6 that will give those residents and
7 businesses control over that money and
8 how it's spent.

9 Additionally, by bringing
10 neighbors together in common cause, I
11 believe we can create economic
12 investments and the development that will
13 invite retail and restaurants to further
14 enhance our neighborhood as well as grow
15 the City.

16 From a business perspective,
17 while Azavea always recruits locally
18 first, we frequently cannot find
19 qualified technical staff we need in the
20 region and we're forced to recruit
21 software engineering talent from all over
22 the United States. For example, tomorrow
23 we will be interviewing a prospective
24 software engineer who currently lives in
25 New Mexico. If he is the right person, I

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2 will need to convince him to come live in
3 Philadelphia. When you look around this
4 neighborhood, that can be a tough sell.
5 So my desire is to see our neighborhood
6 improve not just so that I can work and
7 live in a nicer place, I want a vital and
8 dynamic neighborhood that will make it
9 easy to convince someone from anywhere in
10 the world to relocate their family here,
11 thereby contributing not just their wage
12 taxes, but their energy and commitment to
13 making this city a great place to live.
14 I see the proposed NID as an important
15 step in making that possible, and I urge
16 you to support it.

17 Thank you.

18 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: Thank you
19 for your testimony. Thanks for choosing
20 Philadelphia. We appreciate it.

21 Any questions for these
22 witnesses?

23 COUNCILMAN DiCICCO: Thank you,
24 Mr. Chairman. I just have a statement I
25 should have made at the onset.

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Ms. Hooper, you and I met approximately 16 years ago when I was first sworn in as Councilman for the district, and I appreciate your comments earlier. I too had questioned your reasoning or rationale for wanting to live in that neighborhood, if you remember that conversation some 16 years ago, and I think it's important for this panel, this committee, to understand that.

This is one of those unique neighborhoods where the folks who live there, many of them there 15, 20 years, some have been more recent, have really taken a leap of faith, in my opinion, in moving into this neighborhood. If you've ever had the opportunity to walk or drive through it, you will get a better understanding of why I believe that this NID is crucial to the continual development of this community. And the best part about the folks who live there, they have really asked very little of me

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2 in the last 16 years. We've done some
3 walk-throughs over the years. We've done
4 some tree plantings. We've done some
5 minimal, at best, graffiti removal, and
6 we tried to add some of the street
7 lighting that you desperately needed, but
8 we never were able to get there, because
9 the cost is just too great. We just
10 don't have that kind of money.

11 This is the future of
12 Philadelphia. We're looking at the
13 future of Philadelphia, and that
14 neighborhood is poised, as I think Paul
15 said in his testimony, to become one of
16 the great neighborhoods of the City of
17 Philadelphia. With the NID and the
18 Viaduct coming together, it will not only
19 enhance the Callowhill District, but it
20 will be that missing link, if you will,
21 from Callowhill up to Center City on the
22 east side and now on the west side in
23 Councilman Clarke's district where we're
24 seeing a lot of that development that was
25 up in Fairmount moving and pushing east.

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2 This is that hole in the doughnut, if you
3 will, that I think will really make not
4 only that community but really set
5 Philadelphia many years ahead in
6 developing its core Center City
7 neighborhood.

8 So I want to thank all of you
9 folks who are here, even those who are
10 opposed who may be living in that
11 neighborhood, for all the things that you
12 have done to make my job and City
13 Council's job a lot easier by
14 volunteering and doing the things that
15 you did without any assistance from the
16 City of Philadelphia.

17 Thank you.

18 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: Thank you
19 very much for your comments and your
20 testimony. Thank you.

21 John Chin, Phil Browndeis,
22 Maria Yuen, John Yuen.

23 (Witnesses approached witness
24 table.)

25 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: Whoever is

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2 ready to proceed, please identify
3 yourself for the record.

4 MR. BROWNDIEIS: My name is
5 Philip Browndeis. Council Chairman and
6 members of the Rules Committee, thank you
7 for the opportunity to speak before City
8 Council. My name is Philip Browndeis and
9 I am a resident of the proposed NID.

10 On August 19th, I was notified
11 by the Clerk of City Council that the
12 City of Philadelphia would compel my
13 membership in a private corporation, the
14 Callowhill Reading Viaduct NID, and grant
15 it the power to collect a compulsory
16 assessment on my property, and should I
17 refuse to pay this assessment, the NID
18 would instruct the City of Philadelphia
19 to place a lien on my property.

20 It seems to me that it is not
21 right for City Council to sanction a tiny
22 group of people with the private power to
23 tax their neighbors. This is taxation
24 without representation. It is wrong for
25 City Council to delegate its power to

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2 these people who claim to represent the
3 neighborhood when in fact they represent
4 no one but their own narrow interest.

5 The Callowhill Reading Viaduct
6 NID is not a democratic institution. In
7 a democracy, decision-making power is
8 granted to the representatives elected by
9 its citizens, regardless of whether they
10 own property or not. The small group of
11 people who convinced Councilman DiCicco
12 that they represent us operated in
13 secrecy, without transparency and without
14 informing the neighborhood that their
15 intention was to tax us to reclaim the
16 Reading Viaduct and redevelop the
17 structure into a park.

18 Maybe I'm still just a simple
19 guy from Northeast Philly, but it seems
20 to me that the purpose of the NID is to
21 fulfill the dream of a select group of
22 people who seek to emulate life in New
23 York City and want their very own High
24 Line Park. Paul Levy, CEO of the Center
25 City District, said to New York Times,

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2 quote, "What we want to do is build the
3 first phase, like New York, and have
4 people say they love it and want to do
5 the rest," end quote.

6 Mr. Levy is quoted in the same
7 article stating that the Viaduct Park
8 would only cost \$36 million, but no one
9 has seen Mr. Levy's study. According to
10 a September 14th email from John Struble
11 of the NID Steering Committee to me,
12 Mr. Levy has not even provided his study
13 of the Viaduct Park to the NID Steering
14 Committee.

15 According to an article in the
16 September 15th City Paper, Mr. Levy
17 observed the difficulty of funding the
18 annual maintenance costs of the New York
19 High Line Park and said to the supporters
20 of the Viaduct Park, quote, "We recommend
21 that they consider creating an
22 improvement district both for short-term
23 reasons but also to have in place a
24 mechanism so they wouldn't face this
25 after it's all happened," end quote.

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2 Maybe Mr. Levy can find the
3 money to transform the Viaduct into a
4 park. He knows people. And maybe the
5 park will be more than just a \$36 million
6 dog park. John Struble says that taxing
7 us for the Viaduct is taxation at its
8 best. He is wrong. The Callowhill
9 Reading Viaduct NID empowers the wrong
10 people to tax us for all the wrong
11 reasons.

12 If this proposed public park is
13 so important to development of the City,
14 then let City Council allocate its
15 revenues for that purpose and let the
16 entire City pay for it.

17 It is hard to imagine that in
18 Philadelphia where the Declaration of
19 Independence and the Constitution were
20 written that we, the people of the
21 Callowhill and Chinatown North
22 neighborhoods, would be deprived of our
23 liberty and the right to free association
24 by the City Council of Philadelphia.

25 Please do not vote for this

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2 bill. Thank you for your time.

3 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: Thank you
4 for your testimony.

5 Please identify yourself for
6 the record. Please pull the
7 microphone -- thank you.

8 MS. YUEN: Hi. Excuse my
9 voice. My name is Maria Yuen. I work
10 for the City of Philadelphia, since
11 somebody asked me yesterday what I do for
12 a living. I've been a police officer for
13 almost 18 years. I live within the
14 boundaries of this proposed bill.

15 COUNCILMAN DiCICCO:
16 Mr. Chairman.

17 Where do you live?

18 MS. YUEN: 920 Ridge Avenue.

19 COUNCILMAN DiCICCO: 920?

20 MS. YUEN: Ridge Avenue.

21 COUNCILMAN DiCICCO: Thank you.

22 MS. YUEN: So I first heard
23 about this bill when I received a packet
24 end of August. We, just a small group of
25 us, Mr. Phil, Lee, James Morton, just a

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2 few of us got together outside of
3 Callowhill Association, all of different
4 race, and we said we would not stand for
5 this bill.

6 Since then, I started hitting
7 the pavement. This is where I lost my
8 voice. I hit the pavement door to door
9 starting September 1st within two weeks.
10 And I'm also trying to find out the
11 sentiment of the people in my
12 neighborhood.

13 Now, remember, the bill was
14 introduced in April and none of us knew
15 about this, nor the people that I spoke
16 with. My neighbors did not know about
17 this.

18 And a lot of people also told
19 me they were grateful, because they did
20 not even know about the bill until I
21 approached them about the bill and
22 explained to them what we're doing.

23 There are very few
24 manufacturing left within this boundary.
25 I don't know if you're aware of that.

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2 Very few. And a lot of warehouses. We
3 have very few retail in this area. So
4 who is going to benefit this?
5 Warehouses, manufacturing can move right
6 outside the City. I think you know that.
7 Raising taxes? How is that going to
8 benefit anybody?

9 And to say that this small
10 group of people are representing all of
11 us -- once again, I repeat, I went door
12 to door. Only place I could not get into
13 was high-rise condos that I didn't have
14 access to. Those people I could not
15 speak to.

16 And my husband will take over
17 from here to talk about the results of
18 the petition.

19 COUNCILMAN DiCICCO:

20 Mr. Chairman, before they proceed, could
21 I just show her the map. I think she is
22 in the area that we're going to be
23 amending out.

24 MS. YUEN: But not -- excuse
25 me, sir. With all respect, my petition

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2 was not collected just within my -- I
3 went from 8th to Broad Street, not the
4 front facing, but also from Vine Street
5 to Spring Garden. So people I spoke with
6 are not just in my immediate
7 neighborhood.

8 COUNCILMAN DiCICCO: I
9 understand, but I want to make sure I
10 have it right. You're the 900 block of
11 Ridge?

12 MS. YUEN: That's correct.

13 COUNCILMAN DiCICCO: So you'll
14 be in here somewhere?

15 MS. YUEN: That's correct.

16 COUNCILMAN DiCICCO: Thank you.

17 MS. YUEN: So what you're
18 cutting out is a little tiny corner, but
19 I went -- once again, I walked from
20 Spring Garden to Vine Street, from 8th
21 Street to almost Broad Street to collect
22 my petition, sir.

23 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: Okay.

24 Thank you.

25 Please identify yourself for

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2 the record.

3 MR. YUEN: Yes. This is my
4 wife, by the way, Maria. I'm very proud
5 of her. Because of her voice, she did go
6 knock door to door, and I do want to
7 share the result with you later on.

8 My name is John Yuen. I live
9 in 920 Ridge Avenue, same address as my
10 wife.

11 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: That's
12 good.

13 MR. YUEN: I'm just going to
14 continue on. I'm an engineer by
15 training, so a lot of things I'm
16 extremely proud of which I have
17 accomplished in a very short amount of
18 time. As you know, campaigning is not
19 easy. And this is an election year, as
20 everyone knows.

21 I'm going to go very quickly
22 with basically what I have to say, and
23 you have it also, but basically all stats
24 everyone knows.

25 Out of the 751 properties in

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2 the bill currently as it stands, roughly
3 about 66, I believe, should be out.

4 Number one, 22 of those property belong
5 to the Reading Railroad Company, 12
6 belong to the City of Philadelphia, two
7 belong to the Commonwealth of PA, five
8 PennDOT, one SEPTA. There's five
9 churches in the area, and basically
10 those -- and there are 16 condo parking
11 spaces, by the way.

12 Now, the remaining 650 property
13 are made up of -- consisting of 261 condo
14 units, 86 townhouses and the remaining
15 268 are row houses and businesses.

16 Now, the average tax I
17 calculated from the paying, I guess, a
18 portion out of the 730 paying units, the
19 average tax, property tax, currently as
20 of 2011 is 4,000 per household. Now, the
21 average condo is about 1,100.

22 COUNCILMAN DiCICCO: Excuse me.

23 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: I really
24 would need to see that document.

25 MR. YUEN: Yes, and we have it

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2 all here. Everyone knows --

3 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: Look, I
4 recognize in certain parts of the City
5 that property taxes are extremely high
6 and other parts of the City they are
7 extremely low, but 4,000 on average is
8 difficult. I've been here 20 years. On
9 average is --

10 MR. YUEN: Well, out of the
11 751, there are two that pays quarter of a
12 million dollars a year, and that's 900 --

13 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: If you take
14 those two out, what's the average of the
15 rest?

16 MR. YUEN: I can calculate, but
17 I can provide that information to you.
18 If you provide me email, I'd be happy to
19 actually email it to you.

20 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: I think
21 that would be more illustrative.

22 MR. YUEN: Okay.

23 Now, for example, most of the
24 townhouses and the new condos, they
25 actually pay substantially less, and the

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2 reason why is obvious, because of the
3 ten-year abatement. And if you look, for
4 example, in 2010, there were 25 units in
5 429 13th Street. Their tax abatement
6 expired. Their average was 200 and
7 skyrocketed to \$2,600. This is an 830
8 percent increase in that once you lose
9 your abatement.

10 In 2011, there were 12 units in
11 428 13th Street, and their taxes went on
12 average from 673 to \$2,800. This is a
13 322 percent. This is what happens when
14 you lose -- your abatement expires.

15 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: Can I just
16 ask a question? Do you also have the
17 numbers on the value of the property
18 that's increased in the last ten years or
19 just the amount of taxes?

20 MR. YUEN: Just the amount of
21 taxes.

22 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: I'd be
23 interested in knowing if you can also --

24 MR. YUEN: This is all
25 information provided by the BRT.

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2 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: Let me
3 finish. If you could also I think,
4 again, it would be fairly illustrative --
5 if you could tell us for the record what
6 the value of the property was when it was
7 first abated and what the value of the
8 property is after ten years, because then
9 that would give us --

10 MR. YUEN: That's fluctuation
11 of the market as far as housing is
12 concerned.

13 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: It's called
14 the improvement of the housing value.

15 MR. YUEN: Now, if everybody
16 think that the value of their house is
17 going to increase, well, you have to go
18 over and above 7 percent of the tax you
19 pay. So in basically five years or 35
20 percent, you'd better have your
21 appreciation more than 35 percent to even
22 break even on your appreciation. That is
23 the fact.

24 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: I don't
25 know what the fact is.

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2 MR. YUEN: Let's actually jump
3 right into the results. As I've said, in
4 two weeks, in less than two weeks, my
5 wife actually spearheaded the petition
6 alongside with PCDC, alongside with
7 people, concerned citizen, like Lee
8 Quillen, Phil Browndeis, Maria Bekas,
9 James Morton, myself and the community.
10 We have collected roughly 11 pages, and
11 they are made up of people from, as I
12 said -- I totally agree with Paul Levy.
13 This is a diverse community, and if
14 that's the case, how can you carve out
15 something that is Chinese or otherwise?
16 You cannot guarantee by splitting up
17 these neighborhoods. This is diverse.
18 Chinese Americans and everyone live all
19 over. You cannot put a boundary between
20 Chinese on one side and the other side
21 rest of the people. No, we cannot amend
22 this bill.

23 As far as the --

24 COUNCILMAN DiCICCO: You want
25 in?

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2 MR. YUEN: As far as the number
3 of people, we have collected people from
4 8th Street, 9th Street, 11, 12, a couple
5 of condos, the Lucky Garden, Callowhill,
6 Hamilton, Spring Garden. And to date, to
7 date, we have collected over, over 53.9
8 of the assessed value, and we are ready
9 to submit.

10 (Applause.)

11 MR. YUEN: The people have
12 spoke.

13 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: One second.

14 MR. YUEN: We respectfully --

15 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: One second.
16 One second. Let's all come back to
17 earth. We're having a hearing. We'll be
18 giving testimony, taking testimony. The
19 dramatics and the slamming and stuff is
20 really not necessary. Whatever facts you
21 happen to have, we're happy to review,
22 but let's keep it real.

23 MR. YUEN: To date, we have
24 53.9 of the assessed value. We have not
25 started mailing out, notifying people.

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2 This is just two weeks of foot campaign,
3 foot campaign, hard concern, foot
4 campaign. May I repeat that.

5 And now I would respectfully
6 ask you to withdraw this bill, Councilman
7 DiCicco.

8 COUNCILMAN DiCICCO: I have a
9 question for you in relationship to your
10 comment that you mention Paul Levy was
11 accurate, that is a very diverse
12 neighborhood and we should not draw
13 boundaries that separate one community
14 from the other. Are you suggesting then
15 that I do not do the amendment and keep
16 everything --

17 MR. YUEN: Absolutely. I
18 believe the people have spoken, 53.9 to
19 date, to date.

20 MS. YUEN: Two weeks.

21 COUNCILMAN DiCICCO: We'll keep
22 it all in. I won't amend it.

23 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: Just one
24 philosophical question. Do you think
25 it's a bad thing in general for housing

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2 value to improve over a ten-year period?

3 MR. YUEN: We are paying
4 currently taxes --

5 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: No, no, no.

6 MR. YUEN: No one vote --

7 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: I ask you
8 one question and you answer a different
9 one. Do you think in general it is bad
10 for the value of your home to improve
11 over ten years?

12 MR. YUEN: Who is going to
13 guarantee that?

14 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: No.

15 MR. YUEN: The housing
16 market --

17 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: Your house
18 in the last ten years has improved in
19 value. Do you think that's a good
20 thing --

21 MR. YUEN: Yes. I totally
22 agree with you, as long as I move out of
23 the community.

24 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: Can I just
25 finish the question?

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2 MR. YUEN: As long as I sell my
3 house and move out of the community.

4 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: Why won't
5 you --

6 MR. YUEN: It actually means
7 nothing --

8 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: Why won't
9 you --

10 MR. YUEN: -- if it appreciates
11 if I want to stay in the community.

12 I came -- I live basically in
13 Chinatown.

14 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: You're not
15 going to have a dialogue because you're
16 going to scream over me. So I appreciate
17 your testimony.

18 Councilman --

19 MS. YUEN: Excuse me, sir.

20 What we're saying is --

21 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: Excuse me.

22 Excuse me. Councilman Goode has a
23 question. If you're going to have a
24 discussion, he'll have a discussion. If
25 you're going to scream and yell over

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2 everybody, then we'll let you go and you
3 can go on your way.

4 Councilman Goode.

5 COUNCILMAN GOODE: Thank you,
6 Mr. Chairman.

7 Actually, my question is for
8 Mr. Browndeis. Mr. Browndeis, are you
9 opposed to this particular neighborhood
10 improvement district or are you opposed
11 to neighborhood improvement districts in
12 concept?

13 MR. BROWNDEIS: I'm opposed in
14 concept. As I said, it's not a
15 democratic institution. You, the City
16 Council, are delegating your authority to
17 private citizens and sanctioning them
18 with the power to tax us.

19 COUNCILMAN GOODE: Before you
20 were notified by the Chief Clerk's Office
21 of this proposed NID, were you familiar
22 with neighborhood improvement districts
23 before that?

24 MR. BROWNDEIS: I was aware of
25 the Center City District, but I didn't

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2 know the entire process until I read the
3 bill and I read several articles about
4 the process, and then as I became aware
5 of it, I realized that it was
6 fundamentally a delegation of authority
7 to private citizens.

8 COUNCILMAN GOODE: Have you
9 looked at neighborhood improvement
10 districts that have been done elsewhere
11 within the City or elsewhere within the
12 state or around the country?

13 MR. BROWNEIS: Yes.
14 Councilman, the Germantown Business
15 District is an example of a business
16 district that is not successful. There's
17 very little revenue, and it has faltered,
18 although it is recently extended for 25
19 years on the backs of the residents and
20 businesses there. So I don't think
21 that's a successful one. In fact,
22 there's been no --

23 COUNCILMAN GOODE: I was not
24 asking you to evaluate neighborhood
25 improvement districts. I was asking how

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2 familiar you were with them.

3 MR. BROWNEIS: Until I moved
4 into the area, no, I wasn't. I came back
5 to Philadelphia after many years. I was
6 not aware of this process where the City
7 Council has empowered people to tax
8 neighbors. I was not aware of that.

9 COUNCILMAN GOODE: And that
10 power came from where?

11 MR. BROWNEIS: That was -- the
12 City Council granted it by creating these
13 private corporations.

14 COUNCILMAN GOODE: And that
15 power, that authority --

16 MR. BROWNEIS: You have a
17 municipal statute, I understand, that you
18 can do that.

19 COUNCILMAN GOODE: No. That's
20 actually authority given to us by the
21 state.

22 MR. BROWNEIS: Yes. I
23 understand that.

24 COUNCILMAN GOODE: So City
25 Council did not create neighborhood

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2 improvement districts.

3 MR. BROWNEIS: You are
4 chartering the organization.

5 COUNCILMAN GOODE: I understand
6 exactly what we have done in the past. I
7 understand exactly the matters before us.
8 I'm actually a former economic
9 development practitioner. I've dealt
10 with the whole issue of business
11 improvement districts, business service
12 districts, neighborhood improvement
13 districts for decades. I'm very familiar
14 with them. I'm familiar with those that
15 work, those that haven't worked, and
16 that's why I asked you the question are
17 you opposed to them in general.

18 MR. BROWNEIS: In general,
19 yes.

20 COUNCILMAN GOODE: That I
21 cannot agree with. I mean, if you're
22 opposed to this particular one for
23 particular reasons, I can understand
24 that. As a matter of development, I took
25 particular opposition to your statement

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2 that said that in order to improve a
3 particular area, we should charge the
4 entire City.

5 MR. BROWNDEIS: If it is about
6 the Reading Viaduct and if it is to
7 benefit the whole City -- and, again,
8 this is before you read this language
9 that we found out today was going to be
10 removed. But, yes, if this is a public
11 park to benefit the entire City, then let
12 City Council allocate its revenue.

13 COUNCILMAN GOODE: So you're
14 suggesting that we should have taxed the
15 entire City to improve Center City?

16 MR. BROWNDEIS: It benefits all
17 the residents; does it not?

18 COUNCILMAN GOODE: And so you
19 think the way we went about it in terms
20 of creating the Center City District was
21 wrong?

22 MR. BROWNDEIS: Again, it's
23 allocated private power to a small group
24 of individuals.

25 COUNCILMAN GOODE: I understand

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2 exactly what it does.

3 MR. BROWNEIS: Yes.

4 COUNCILMAN GOODE: And I also
5 understand how effective it's been.

6 MR. BROWNEIS: Listen, with
7 all due respect, the death penalty is
8 legal, but I don't know if it's
9 effective. Many people oppose it, but
10 it's the law.

11 COUNCILMAN GOODE: I don't
12 think it is. I don't think the death
13 penalty is effective, but that's not --

14 MR. BROWNEIS: It's the same
15 principle.

16 COUNCILMAN GOODE: No, it's not
17 the same principle. That's not what
18 we're discussing.

19 MR. BROWNEIS: It's a law, but
20 I don't believe it's right.

21 COUNCILMAN GOODE: So what
22 would be more effective?

23 MR. BROWNEIS: I believe that
24 the City should allocate its resources,
25 accept its responsibility to provide

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2 clean streets and lighting that benefits
3 the whole City.

4 COUNCILMAN GOODE: That's not
5 the question I asked. What would be more
6 effective at developing that particular
7 area?

8 MR. BROWNDEIS: Not on the
9 backs of the neighbors.

10 COUNCILMAN GOODE: I asked you
11 what would be more effective.

12 MR. BROWNDEIS: What would be
13 more effective is the City provides
14 services such as clean streets, proper
15 lighting and do all the things to make
16 this a better city.

17 COUNCILMAN GOODE: To add
18 particular services to that particular
19 area, what would be a more effective
20 tool?

21 MR. BROWNDEIS: I suggest that
22 we use the general revenue funds for
23 everybody. We all are residents of the
24 City.

25 COUNCILMAN GOODE: In order to

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2 add additional services -- I'll ask it
3 one more time to see if you can actually
4 follow the logic of this.

5 MR. BROWNDEIS: Okay.

6 COUNCILMAN GOODE: In order to
7 provide additional services to that
8 particular area, what would be a more
9 effective means of doing that? That's
10 the only question I'm asking.

11 MR. BROWNDEIS: Okay. I will
12 again proceed with my answer. I believe
13 that in my neighborhood and any other,
14 when there is a need for street cleaning
15 and lighting, whether it's more lighting
16 or more street cleaning, it is the
17 responsibility of City Council to
18 allocate that and provide the funds. It
19 is not up to each neighborhood to do
20 that. Because if you wish to dissolve
21 the responsibility, then what is next?
22 Police power? Do we provide our own
23 security? No.

24 I believe that is up to the
25 City to provide that and not do it on the

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2 backs of individual neighbors.

3 COUNCILMAN GOODE: And I think
4 you're confusing the issue of basic
5 services and additional services, but --

6 MR. BROWNEIS: I don't see
7 why, sir, that you do not provide it.

8 COUNCILMAN GOODE: But I
9 believe you've answered the question, and
10 what you're saying is that you don't
11 believe in tax assessment districts, that
12 things will be provided through General
13 Fund, and I can say that the response to
14 that is, then there would be no
15 additional money and there would be no
16 additional services.

17 Thank you.

18 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: Councilman
19 DiCicco.

20 COUNCILMAN DiCICCO: Thank you,
21 Mr. Chairman.

22 I want to clear something up.
23 You keep referencing that the City has
24 the responsibility to do the improvements
25 to the Viaduct. The City is taking that

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2 initiative. There's two things going on
3 in this community, the Viaduct and the
4 NID issue. They are somewhat linked
5 insofar as if the NID is established,
6 that lighting, cleaning, other
7 improvements to the Viaduct may be a part
8 of their annual budget, but it is not a
9 direct revenue stream to build out the
10 Viaduct. It is a City, SEPTA and
11 hopefully a Reading Railroad joint
12 venture to make the Viaduct -- make the
13 improvements to the Viaduct and create
14 this environment that we're looking to
15 create.

16 This NID was not created to
17 develop the Viaduct. The City is putting
18 in somewhere around 5 million, if memory
19 serves me right, to date. I'm using NTI
20 funds, about a half a million dollars or
21 maybe more. I'm thinking of shifting
22 some money from other places so they
23 actually -- I may be putting more NTI
24 money in.

25 So there may be some dollars as

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2 it was laid out at what the NID intends
3 to do - clean streets, graffiti removal,
4 lighting - that will maintain or support
5 some of the maintenance of the Viaduct,
6 but it is not the revenue stream to
7 develop the Viaduct.

8 MR. BROWNDEIS: If I may add,
9 the language appeared there in the
10 ordinance, that the mission statement was
11 to reclaim and redevelop the Reading
12 Viaduct as a park.

13 COUNCILMAN DiCICCO: In the
14 context of developing that area, yes.

15 MR. BROWNDEIS: Well, sir, our
16 concern was that this is never ending
17 and --

18 COUNCILMAN DiCICCO: This is
19 what? I'm sorry.

20 MR. BROWNDEIS: This will never
21 end. It is not a democratic institution.
22 As I said, Mr. Levy is quoted as saying
23 that this NID is necessary to provide
24 maintenance for it.

25 COUNCILMAN DiCICCO: We are a

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2 governing body. You are a citizen of
3 this city. You are here testifying
4 today. Is that not a democracy? Are we
5 not elected to make those decisions?

6 MR. BROWNEIS: The NID itself
7 is not a democratic institution. City
8 Council is --

9 COUNCILMAN DiCICCO: It's part
10 of legislation. It's part of the
11 legislative process.

12 MS. YUEN: Excuse me,
13 Mr. DiCicco. Can I ask you a question?
14 Do you represent all of us or just a
15 special interest? Because what does this
16 petition mean, 53.9?

17 COUNCILMAN DiCICCO: I suggest
18 that you look at my record.

19 MS. YUEN: What does that mean,
20 sir? If we go up to 65 percent, what
21 does that mean? Are you here as a
22 neutral listening to both sides? Because
23 people have spoken from what I'm hearing.
24 I did not only speak with Asian people.
25 I did not only speak with Chinese people.

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2 I spoke with all races, all different
3 background, also businesspeople, some of
4 them manufacturers, and they objected to
5 this bill.

6 COUNCILMAN DiCICCO: When you
7 say do I represent "us," who is "us"?

8 MS. YUEN: All of us who live
9 in Philadelphia, who live in this area.
10 What I'm hearing from you, sir, from the
11 beginning of the hearing is that you are
12 pushing this, and I find that -- you are
13 not guaranteeing anything. You're
14 leaving this office, first of all, and
15 then you're pushing for this bill, which
16 is 53.9 has said no, in two weeks,
17 without mailing, without contacting, some
18 of the condo --

19 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: Listen to
20 me, you don't understand --

21 MS. YUEN: I'm trying to
22 understand.

23 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: You don't
24 understand the process. This is not the
25 end --

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2 MS. YUEN: Sir.

3 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: Let me
4 finish.

5 This is not the end of the
6 process. There's a two-hearing
7 requirement, and after the second hearing
8 is when the alleged 53 percent of the
9 people will have a chance to express
10 their view against the bill. That's when
11 it happens. So if it's 53 or 43 or 33 or
12 20, we will find out --

13 MS. YUEN: So, sir.

14 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: Let me
15 finish -- 45 days after the second
16 hearing. This is the first hearing.
17 Forty-five days after the second hearing,
18 people will have an opportunity to either
19 mail in or bring into the Chief Clerk's
20 Office their opposition, and if your
21 numbers are right, this won't happen and
22 the Viaduct won't get developed and the
23 neighborhood won't get cleaned up and the
24 graffiti will stay and we'll move on.

25 MS. YUEN: Sir, I understand

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2 the procedural ruling. I understand
3 about that. Are you saying that even
4 though -- and you can verify each
5 address, each signature, each owner who
6 signed for the property, but what I'm
7 saying to you, that's fine. If that's
8 what you want, we will show you. It will
9 go beyond this. This is in two weeks.
10 I'm just letting you know.

11 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: Let me say
12 it again, because maybe you're just not
13 hearing me.

14 MS. YUEN: No. I hear it loud
15 and clear.

16 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: This is the
17 first --

18 MS. YUEN: But you also have
19 the power to withdraw the bill.

20 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: We're not
21 withdrawing the bill until we go through
22 the process. So what do you want me to
23 tell you?

24 MS. YUEN: You have the power.

25 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: I have the

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2 power --

3 MS. YUEN: You're going to
4 waste more time and taxpayers' money.

5 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: You know
6 what, we're done. Thank you for your
7 testimony. We'll see you at the second
8 hearing, I'm sure.

9 Mr. Chin, are you testifying?
10 Because I called you and you didn't come
11 up.

12 MR. CHIN: Yes.

13 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: Mr. Reuben,
14 Tamara Sepe.

15 (Witnesses approached witness
16 table.)

17 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: Please
18 identify yourself for the record.

19 MR. CHIN: John Chin, C-H-I-N,
20 Executive Director of the Philadelphia
21 Chinatown Development Corporation.
22 Chairman Kenney and members of the Rules
23 Committee, thank you very much for this
24 opportunity to speak before you today.

25 PCDC was founded 45 years ago

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2 to save a church and school, and all the
3 work that we've done in this community is
4 about improving it for all people living
5 in the neighborhood. We've worked with
6 Councilman DiCicco and many members of
7 the City Council to bring about improving
8 the quality of life in the neighborhood,
9 and we continue to do so.

10 We continue to promote,
11 preserve and protect Chinatown. We
12 provide financial counseling services and
13 social services to several hundred
14 clients annually. We are invested in
15 this community, and, in fact, PCDC worked
16 with the Callowhill Neighbors Association
17 years ago and their members to help
18 establish their organization, because we
19 thought that and we believe that working
20 together, that we can improve this
21 neighborhood. So we believe in clean and
22 green neighborhoods.

23 What we do not agree with is
24 this legislation and parts of this
25 legislation as written. Here are some of

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2 the programs that we have implemented in
3 the community. We have a Dollar Day
4 Cleaning Campaign where we raise money
5 from within the Chinatown community,
6 donations, and we've hired three
7 part-time personnel to sweep and clean
8 the streets of Chinatown. And they go as
9 far up as Callowhill Street from 8th to
10 12th Streets.

11 We participate in semi-annual
12 clean-ups with other groups in the
13 Chinatown community, and we hold outdoor
14 events in Chinatown to bring about
15 visitors and tourist dollars to the
16 neighborhood.

17 PCDC opposes Bill 110307
18 because as it's written and as reference
19 to the Reading Viaduct, it provides
20 benefits to special interests. It is
21 asking people as far as three blocks away
22 from the Reading Viaduct to pay a 7
23 percent tax increase. And what we know
24 is that the handful of property owners
25 that are most adjacent to the Reading

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2 Viaduct will reap the most significant
3 benefits.

4 This bill is about steering
5 money toward the maintenance of a park
6 called the Reading Viaduct Project more
7 than it is about cleaning and safety. Of
8 the \$250,000 proposed increase in taxes,
9 40 percent of those taxes do not go to
10 cleaning of the neighborhood.

11 What I will tell you is that
12 this bill places an undue financial
13 burden on many working families. It's
14 not a modest tax assessment, as this bill
15 states. The 7 percent tax increase is
16 the third real estate tax increase
17 proposed in 13 months. This City Council
18 has already approved real estate tax
19 increases of 9.9 percent and 3.85
20 percent, for a total of 13.75 percent in
21 new taxes. This bill will force families
22 in Chinatown to pay real estate tax
23 increases totaling 20.75 percent, 7
24 percent more than any other neighborhood
25 during the same period of time. What

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2 will happen when the Office of Property
3 Assessment begins reassessing real estate
4 values in our neighborhood? This is a
5 regressive tax.

6 For many people in this
7 community, asking them to pay higher
8 taxes is asking them to make difficult
9 choices. Maybe they forego the purchase
10 of new clothes for their children. Maybe
11 a senior citizen chooses to turn off her
12 heat several hours a day. In Chinatown
13 40.4 percent of households have income
14 less than \$10,000. 40.4 percent.

15 Chinatown lags the City of
16 Philadelphia in education attainment.
17 Thirty percent of residents over the age
18 of 25 have not completed high school,
19 compared to 20 percent in Philadelphia
20 overall.

21 Unemployment is also very high
22 in Chinatown sitting at 23 percent. The
23 City of Philadelphia currently has an
24 estimated unemployment level of 16
25 percent. This year, for the first time

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2 in 14 years, my organization was involved
3 in helping two families dealing with
4 mortgage difficulties. We are living in
5 the greatest recession since 1929. This
6 tax will push families to the edge.

7 Finally, PCDC laid the
8 groundwork for redevelopment, greening
9 and housing in the Chinatown North
10 District. 1997 marked the completion of
11 our first planned urban development of 51
12 units of mixed-income housing. This
13 project received the Fannie Mae Maxwell
14 Award for Excellence. This was the first
15 new housing in Chinatown in 15 years. We
16 successfully moved many families out of
17 substandard housing into a place they
18 call home today. The bill would sanction
19 a second entity to plan and implement
20 projects, setting up this neighborhood
21 for future conflicts. The residents call
22 Chinatown North home and want to continue
23 living in Chinatown North. Bill 110307
24 would change the name and take that away
25 prior to Councilman DiCicco's

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2 announcement.

3 I think for all the reasons
4 stated above, this bill will negatively
5 impact Chinatown and the surrounding
6 neighborhood. On behalf of the PCDC and
7 the residents in the community, we urge
8 you to vote against Bill 110307.

9 And I would just say that
10 carving out a section of the map to
11 exclude it from the bill doesn't account
12 for the fact that all these people here
13 live beyond that section that's been
14 proposed to be carved out.

15 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: Thank you
16 for your testimony.

17 Please identify yourself for
18 the record.

19 MR. REUBEN: My name is Gary
20 Reuben and, Mr. Chairman and members of
21 the Council, I thank you for the
22 opportunity to present my testimony in
23 favor of the NID.

24 My business partner and I
25 purchased the Wolf Building in May of

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2 1997. Located at the corner of 12th and
3 Callowhill, this seven-story, 170,000
4 square foot building had been vacant for
5 some number of years when we took
6 ownership. We have continually improved
7 the building in the intervening years,
8 plowing millions of dollars into
9 upgrades, which have included all new
10 electrical, mechanical and plumbing
11 systems, modernized elevators,
12 life-safety systems and more. Today,
13 even in a difficult economy, the Wolf
14 Building is thriving with some 50
15 apartments, 50,000 square feet of
16 non-profits and social services
17 providers, and 30 or 40 businesses, which
18 include architects, production companies
19 and even an internationally renowned art
20 school.

21 Fifteen years ago, when I made
22 a commitment to this neighborhood, I was
23 considered a pioneer. Now our
24 neighborhood is maturing and new,
25 substantial developments are underway and

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2 continue to be undertaken. The
3 character, diversity and vibrancy of our
4 neighborhood are emerging and becoming
5 quite an attraction. Nonetheless, we
6 struggle against the tide of trash and
7 graffiti and the many problems associated
8 with these, which give an impression of
9 our neighborhood as suffering from
10 continuing decay, neglect and, of course,
11 crime. While there are significant
12 numbers of us who are fully invested in
13 making the commitment to maintain and
14 improve our properties and who know these
15 words don't properly characterize our
16 neighborhood, all too often we find
17 ourselves having to overcome the deficit
18 of this first impression just to get to
19 the starting line as we struggle to
20 entice new business associates and
21 residents to join us.

22 And so the creation of an NID
23 is a logical step for us to take at this
24 point. As a businessowner, I consider
25 the additional levy to be an investment

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2 that undoubtedly will pay handsome
3 returns. Significantly, we will be
4 making this investment in our own
5 community, according to our own knowledge
6 and assessment of very particular,
7 localized priorities and needs. And
8 while none of us is anxious to pay
9 additional taxes, the NID provides a
10 mechanism for us to leverage our
11 individual contributions for the purpose
12 of making a major impact. As one of the
13 larger property owners who will be making
14 one of the larger contributions, I can
15 tell you authoritatively that the amount
16 of the payment will not impact my bottom
17 line in any significant way, and I have
18 absolutely no intention of passing along
19 the cost directly to my tenants. To put
20 it in perspective, I spend an amount
21 equal to the additional NID charge just
22 stocking the bathrooms in my building
23 with soap and paper products.

24 Our neighborhood stands ready
25 to step up and establish itself as a

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2 great place to live and work, and is a
3 great asset to the City of Philadelphia.
4 We have big plans for our future. We
5 have the energy and the resources to make
6 big things happen. Please support us by
7 supporting the creation of the CRVNID.

8 Thank you.

9 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: Thank you
10 for your testimony.

11 Please identify yourself for
12 the record and proceed.

13 MS. SEPE: My name is Tamara
14 Sepe. I live, own property, run my
15 business and, most importantly, raise my
16 son at 1018-1/2 Hamilton Street within
17 the boundaries of the proposed NID.

18 I have been an early childhood
19 educator for 13 years, providing services
20 to children with special needs. Most of
21 the families and professionals I have
22 worked with would describe me as a strong
23 advocate for the wellbeing of children in
24 the City, and they know me as someone who
25 goes above and beyond in my fight for

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2 children to receive the services they
3 need and are entitled to.

4 A lot of people don't think of
5 children when they think of this
6 neighborhood, but they should. There are
7 at least four schools included in the NID
8 boundaries, serving at least 1,800
9 children. There are multiple social
10 service agencies, such as Bethanna, a
11 foster care and adoption agency, and at
12 their Wood Street location, you can see
13 many of the 2,000 families they serve
14 coming in and out.

15 We have at least one day care
16 and at least two churches that I believe
17 Mr. Yuen's testimony, he mentioned more
18 than two, and those churches have youth
19 programs. There are a growing number of
20 children living in the apartments, row
21 homes and condos in this neighborhood.
22 If you walk down 11th Street, you will
23 see families and children walking, and on
24 a hot night when windows are open, I will
25 hear the voices of children echoing into

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2 my own home.

3 As a new mother of a
4 ten-month-old, I see the potential for my
5 son to live in a vibrant community where
6 he has many friends right in his own
7 neighborhood. I envision him running
8 into other children with whom he plays
9 and chats on 11th Street while their
10 parents and I exchange pleasantries or
11 discuss neighborhood issues. I see the
12 character of the neighborhood, its
13 history and diversity shaping his own
14 character and preparing him to be an
15 actively engaged citizen who contributes
16 to his community.

17 Allowing the current issues of
18 litter, short dumping and poor security
19 to continue unchecked prevents this
20 vision and sends a message to our
21 children: It doesn't matter, filth is
22 acceptable, we simply don't care. We are
23 telling them their health, both physical
24 and spiritual, is unimportant. Besides
25 the immediate harm we are doing, we are

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2 ensuring the next generation will inherit
3 this problem as we are modeling a set of
4 attitudes and behaviors that will surely
5 carry on.

6 Some people will say if I don't
7 like it, I should move. But I love my
8 home, which was abandoned when I moved in
9 and which I fixed with my husband. And I
10 love my neighbors. My husband, a metal
11 worker, works just two blocks away, so
12 the baby and I can easily visit during
13 the day. I like the architecture and I
14 like the history of this neighborhood,
15 both as an icon of our industrial past
16 and as a hub for new immigrants. I don't
17 want to move, but if really, really
18 pressed, I could. The children who live
19 here, go to school, church and day care
20 or come for social services, however,
21 don't have that choice. The adults in
22 their lives have made it for them. And
23 that is why it is our responsibility to
24 provide them with a safe and healthy
25 environment by passing this NID. We owe

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2 it to them to engage ourselves in a civil
3 dialogue about how to resolve these
4 issues, and we owe it to them to follow
5 this up with action.

6 I became an NID supporter
7 because I saw it as an opportunity for
8 our community to work together to
9 transform itself. I continue to believe
10 in this vision of the neighborhood, and I
11 urge you to support the NID as a vehicle
12 for achieving these goals.

13 Finally, I want to acknowledge
14 my sadness that there are people who feel
15 their voices have not been heard, who
16 have felt excluded from this process.
17 This was certainly never our intent. I
18 want those people to know that while
19 ideally we would be making each other's
20 acquaintance under different
21 circumstances, I am looking forward to
22 hearing from them, both today as they
23 testify and after this meeting, and
24 ultimately working alongside each other
25 to find solutions.

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2 Thank you for hearing my
3 testimony.

4 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: Thank you
5 very much for your testimony. Thank you.

6 Sorry. Hold on one second,
7 please.

8 Councilman Clarke.

9 COUNCILMAN CLARKE: Thank you,
10 Mr. Chair. Mr. Chairman, I'm not sure I
11 necessarily have questions for these
12 individuals, maybe Mr. Chin, but I
13 actually had some kind of broader
14 questions as it relates to the process --
15 not process, but the ultimate outcome.

16 One, Mr. Chin, this is a
17 question for you. When you said there
18 were a number of residential property
19 owners in the targeted area and whose
20 income was \$10,000 or less, did I hear
21 you say that?

22 MR. CHIN: Yes.

23 COUNCILMAN CLARKE: What was
24 that percentage?

25 MR. CHIN: Forty point four

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2 percent of the population in Chinatown's
3 income is at \$10,000 or less.

4 COUNCILMAN CLARKE: Just
5 generally?

6 MR. CHIN: Yes.

7 COUNCILMAN CLARKE: The reason
8 I ask that question --

9 COUNCILMAN DiCICCO: Point of
10 order, if I may, Councilman. I don't
11 want to interrupt you, but when you say,
12 Mr. Chin, Chinatown, what boundaries are
13 you referring to that reflect that
14 40-something percent?

15 MR. CHIN: Filbert Street going
16 up to Spring Garden --

17 COUNCILMAN DiCICCO: I'm sorry?

18 MR. CHIN: Filbert to Spring
19 Garden, 8th to 13th.

20 COUNCILMAN DiCICCO: And part
21 of that is north of where this NID would
22 take place. Filbert Street --

23 MR. REUBEN: You mean south.

24 COUNCILMAN DiCICCO: South.
25 I'm sorry. Filbert Street north to Vine

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2 would be -- they're part of that 44
3 percent. So if you extract those
4 residents, that number 44 would go down
5 considerably, wouldn't it?

6 MR. CHIN: Twenty percent.

7 COUNCILMAN DiCICCO: Thank you.
8 I just wanted to clear that up. Thank
9 you.

10 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: Councilman.

11 COUNCILMAN CLARKE: Thank you.
12 Thank you, Councilman.

13 Okay. So 20 percent of the
14 targeted area are under the 10,000. I
15 understand if you don't have this
16 information. Of that 20 percent, could
17 you calculate how many are probably
18 senior citizens?

19 MR. CHIN: That I couldn't give
20 you today.

21 COUNCILMAN CLARKE: I
22 understand that. The reason I ask that,
23 because based on that number, it's clear
24 that if the individuals were seniors,
25 they would fall under the City's Senior

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2 Citizens Tax Relief Program, so they
3 would not incur an additional assessment,
4 increase in their taxes. And I also ask,
5 as a result of that in the calculation of
6 the \$250,000, was that taken into account
7 that if assuming -- and I imagine if
8 somehow this happened, people would
9 aggressively ensure that people who
10 qualify under that tax relief program
11 would be involved.

12 Is that \$250,000 -- and I guess
13 I'm more asking this question of
14 Councilman DiCicco -- that 250,000 is
15 based on every property owner paying an
16 additional increase?

17 COUNCILMAN DiCICCO: Correct.

18 COUNCILMAN CLARKE: Regardless
19 of income?

20 COUNCILMAN DiCICCO: Correct.
21 Based on the real estate.

22 COUNCILMAN CLARKE: Based on
23 real estate. So it could possibly be
24 lower.

25 The other question I have in

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2 terms of the mix, the split between
3 businesses and residents, residential
4 properties, is there information on that,
5 how much revenue the business properties,
6 businesses, would raise in terms of
7 increased assessment; i.e., dollars to
8 the NID versus the residential? And the
9 reason I ask that question, because we're
10 actually in the process of doing I guess
11 it's a BID up in the Temple University
12 area, because there is an issue about
13 being able to provide additional clean-up
14 and security protection for the residents
15 in the Temple area, and we opted to go
16 the BID, because residents did not want
17 to have the additional tax imposed,
18 because they say that the problem that
19 was being created was as a result of the
20 businesses.

21 So I'm wondering if there's a
22 split between -- if we had that
23 information, what would the businesses
24 raise if the BID were incorporated as
25 opposed to the NID.

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2 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: We have
3 time between this hearing and the next
4 hearing to come up with that number.

5 Additionally, Mr. Chin, are the
6 folks you're talking about generally at
7 that \$10,000 income level and senior
8 citizens eligible for the state real
9 estate rebate if they own their property?

10 MR. CHIN: I don't know which
11 ones would apply. I know we've helped --

12 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: Well,
13 certainly 10,000 or under they certainly
14 meet the income threshold.

15 MR. CHIN: We've helped some
16 families in the community apply for --

17 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: But they
18 certainly meet the income threshold at
19 \$10,000, and if they're seniors, whatever
20 real estate taxes they pay get rebated by
21 the state, correct, through lottery
22 funds?

23 MR. CHIN: Yes.

24 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: So they
25 aren't paying anything, correct?

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2 MR. CHIN: I don't know how
3 much --

4 COUNCILMAN CLARKE: It's a rent
5 rebate.

6 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: It's a real
7 estate tax rebate. So if you're a
8 senior, you own your property, you pay
9 real estate taxes, you make under a
10 certain -- I don't know what the income
11 level is.

12 COUNCILMAN DiCICCO: I think
13 it's 15 or 16.

14 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: Fifteen or
15 \$16,000, you get your real estate taxes
16 rebated by the state through lottery
17 money. So you're not paying any real
18 estate taxes if you're in that category.

19 MR. CHIN: If you're in that
20 category and you get 100 percent rebate,
21 yeah, then that's true, yes.

22 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: All right.
23 Just so the record is clear.

24 Councilman Clarke.

25 COUNCILMAN CLARKE: This is for

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2 informational purposes, because if this
3 passes -- and I'm not sure. I'm not even
4 sure how I'll vote ultimately on it, but
5 I wanted to make sure that we're dealing
6 with accurate information and make sure
7 on both sides of the issue, either
8 support or non-support, if it does and if
9 it doesn't happen, we want to make sure
10 that the information is accurate.

11 Councilman, I heard several
12 questions relating to this concern about
13 the Viaduct, and there appears to be
14 language in there that is somewhat
15 ambiguous in terms of what this money
16 will ultimately be spent for, and I see
17 that that seems to be a significant issue
18 among a lot of residents, particularly
19 ones that don't live directly adjacent to
20 the Viaduct.

21 Is there a way that that
22 language could be clear in terms of what
23 that money would be used for?

24 COUNCILMAN DiCICCO: Yeah. I
25 think that could be arranged, but I don't

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2 want to mislead people into suggesting
3 that the monies that would be collected
4 in the NID, that it would never, any of
5 that money, would ever be used for
6 maintenance or cleaning or lighting. I
7 mean, that Viaduct is part of the
8 geography of the community where the NID
9 is going to be established. So what are
10 we saying, anything above street level we
11 won't take care of?

12 COUNCILMAN CLARKE: I don't --

13 COUNCILMAN DiCICCO: I
14 understand your question. I think we can
15 get close to that, but in all honesty, I
16 can never suggest that, when the NID
17 Board meets and decides on programs that
18 they want the money to be spent on that
19 someone would say, Oh, we can't spend any
20 money to do some maintenance on the
21 Viaduct. I mean, they could make that
22 decision.

23 COUNCILMAN CLARKE: The Board
24 itself?

25 COUNCILMAN DiCICCO: Yeah.

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2 They determine how the money gets spent.
3 Whether it's lighting, whether it's
4 graffiti removal, whether it's clean-up
5 or all of those, that's the decisions
6 that the Board makes.

7 COUNCILMAN CLARKE: So do we
8 have to have that in the ordinance?
9 Since the Board would ultimately make the
10 determination as to how that money would
11 be spent, should it be referenced in the
12 ordinance in any level of specificity
13 that it would go towards -- that seems to
14 be a big issue.

15 COUNCILMAN DiCICCO: I can see
16 Mr. Levy trying to -- do you want to come
17 up?

18 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: While he's
19 on his way up, can we just get
20 Councilwoman Brown to ask her question
21 and Mr. Levy can --

22 COUNCILMAN DiCICCO: I have
23 another question for Mr. Chin afterwards.

24 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: Good
25 morning.

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2 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: Does anyone
3 have any questions for the other two
4 witnesses?

5 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: I do.

6 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: Oh, you do?
7 Okay. Thank you.

8 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: Good
9 morning. Mr. Chin, I want to start with
10 a question raised by my colleague,
11 Councilman Goode, of another witness.

12 What is your position
13 philosophically on the concept of
14 neighborhood improvement districts?

15 MR. CHIN: I think
16 philosophically, I think if operated well
17 and assessed properly, they do bring
18 benefits, and we've seen that. But it's
19 a matter of fairness and evenhandedness
20 with legislation. The biggest issue
21 right now with this legislation is the
22 fact that there is direct reference to
23 the Reading Viaduct Project and there are
24 no restrictions at all that none of these
25 monies would not be used for that

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2 project.

3 This is a very expensive
4 project. This legislation is
5 single-focused on the Reading Viaduct,
6 outside of the cleaning services, and we
7 as a non-profit in Chinatown have worked
8 many, many years on many needs and issues
9 of the community, yet none of those needs
10 and priorities are addressed anywhere
11 with this neighborhood improvement
12 district.

13 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: When you
14 say "we" support it when it is fair,
15 define "we." Who is "we," so that we're
16 all on the same page here? Who is "we"?
17 Is "we" the Philadelphia Chinatown
18 Development Corporation?

19 MR. CHIN: I am, yes,
20 Philadelphia Chinatown Development
21 Corporation.

22 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN:
23 Procedurally, inside the organization was
24 there Board action that authorized you to
25 move to render the position you've taken

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2 today? Share with us what process the
3 organization went through to get to the
4 position you've shared with us today.

5 MR. CHIN: This matter was
6 discussed at at least two separate Board
7 meetings. At those two meetings, the
8 Board voted on this particular Bill
9 110307 and voted to oppose this bill as
10 written.

11 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: Was that
12 vote unanimous?

13 MR. CHIN: Yes.

14 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: Thank you.

15 Ms. Tamara, correct my thinking
16 if I misheard you. Did I hear you say
17 that you own a child care center in this
18 area?

19 MS. SEPE: No. I am a speech
20 therapist and I have a small private
21 practice within this area that contracts
22 with the City of Philadelphia.

23 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: Did I hear
24 you say that your little people attend a
25 child care center in this area?

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2 MS. SEPE: There are children
3 who come to me, to my office, for speech
4 therapy, yes, and some families have been
5 uncomfortable with the neighborhood, and
6 in fact, once while I was treating a
7 session, my home was vandalized by
8 somebody throwing a rock through a
9 window.

10 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: Okay.
11 Based on your observation of the child
12 care centers in the area, are they
13 culturally rich?

14 MS. SEPE: Yes.

15 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: And so to
16 anyone at the table, have there been
17 opportunities where all worlds that sit
18 in the boundaries of this district have
19 had an opportunity to interface in a way
20 that's positive and favorable on an
21 issue?

22 MS. SEPE: Yes.

23 MR. REUBEN: Yes.

24 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: Cite
25 examples or testimony.

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2 MS. SEPE: I'm sorry. You said
3 favorable on this issue?

4 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: On an
5 issue. Separate from this, have there
6 been other opportunities where residents
7 of the boundaries that we're talking
8 about have had a chance to interface in a
9 favorable way?

10 MS. SEPE: I would reference
11 the neighborhood clean-ups where we've
12 had residents from many different
13 organizations, backgrounds work together
14 to clean the neighborhood. Does that
15 answer?

16 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: In some
17 way.

18 Please, sir.

19 MR. REUBEN: Because my
20 building is zoned G-2 Industrial, for
21 just about anything I want to do in the
22 building, I have to go before the Zoning
23 Board of Adjustment for a variance, and
24 the place I start is with the
25 neighborhood association. So I've had at

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2 least in the past 14 years probably 30
3 different encounters with the
4 neighborhood association, including PCDC,
5 at which people from all walks of life
6 within the neighborhood have had an
7 opportunity to weigh in with their
8 opinion. And since in those 30-some
9 variance requests I've been successful
10 100 percent of the time, I would say that
11 it's been a positive outcome.

12 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: What
13 neighborhood association is that?

14 MR. REUBEN: Well, my building
15 is located at 12th and Callowhill and we
16 certainly think of ourselves as part of
17 the Callowhill Neighbors Association, but
18 we have brought various requests for
19 zoning variances to PCDC, including the
20 most recent one, which was to create a --
21 I think the most recent one was to create
22 a performing arts venue in the basement
23 level of our building.

24 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: My last
25 question is, is the financial aspect of

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2 this bill or the financial obligation of
3 this bill the wedge, one of the wedges,
4 or what?

5 MR. REUBEN: For me it's almost
6 a non-factor. We have invested so much
7 in the real estate that this -- I feel
8 that this small additional charge, when
9 gathered together with all of the other
10 businesses and residents in the
11 neighborhood, would give us a chance to
12 have a major, major impact. We have lots
13 of vacant property with absentee
14 landlords, and unfortunately, in all too
15 many cases, those people don't make the
16 commitment that I make with my property.
17 And so that if there were a mechanism
18 that, to my way of thinking, is fairly
19 painless to make those people step up to
20 the plate, that will leverage the money
21 that I willingly put out for this and
22 allow us to make a major, major impact in
23 the community.

24 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: Mr. Chin,
25 finally, did you tell the story of the

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2 specifics of this bill or did a
3 representative from the Councilman's
4 staff come in to speak to the specifics
5 of the bill?

6 MR. CHIN: The specifics of the
7 bill, we read the bill and obtained the
8 specifics of the bill. We were
9 approached with the general concept of
10 this legislation, but we had to read the
11 legislation for the very specific items
12 in there.

13 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: Thank you
14 all for your testimony.

15 MR. CHIN: I would just like to
16 make one point of
17 distinction/clarification for the record
18 in answering your question about our
19 general philosophy about BIDs and NIDs.
20 I want to make a clarification that
21 business improvement districts, our
22 philosophy is, they do bring about some
23 good to communities. There is a
24 distinction between a business district
25 versus a neighborhood improvement

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2 district and how property owners -- which
3 property owners are taxed. So the BID is
4 the one that's --

5 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: I'm sorry.

6 Just on a broader note, there seems to be
7 a lot of fixation and discussion about
8 this Viaduct, and Councilman DiCicco has
9 endeavored to clear the fact that
10 although the money that's going to be
11 raised specifically is not for the
12 development of the Viaduct in the future,
13 perhaps the Board would make a decision
14 to light or clean whatever comes out as a
15 result of the Viaduct project. And
16 there's been -- I don't know if it was
17 your testimony or someone else's in
18 opposition of the bill that said how does
19 the Viaduct project like that impact or
20 help anyone who lives three or four
21 blocks away. Is that your position?

22 MR. CHIN: Yes.

23 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: And I look
24 at the other example of what probably is
25 one of the most beautiful and vibrant

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2 children's parks in the world or in the
3 country right at Franklin Square, and I
4 recognize that it's also adjacent to
5 Chinatown, what we know as Chinatown.
6 And not that Chinese Americans can't live
7 everywhere, but we recognize Chinatown as
8 one of those places.

9 Public money, private money,
10 state money were all put into the
11 development and improvement of that,
12 which was basically a hotel for men who
13 drink, and now it's something different.
14 The people who live in Chinatown and who
15 have children, I assume, will walk three
16 or four, five blocks to utilize that
17 carousel and playground area and Square
18 Burger and whatever else that's going on
19 in there and the beautiful fountain
20 that's there.

21 What's the difference between
22 the Viaduct, when Councilman Greenlee has
23 said he's been to the one in New York,
24 that it's unbelievable, and the one at
25 Penn that just opened again is

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2 unbelievable? And it doesn't just affect
3 the people who live in the block next to
4 the Viaduct. Why is the Viaduct's
5 development, ultimate development, some
6 kind of negative? I don't understand
7 with, again -- and with Franklin Square
8 as an example, that the people who live
9 in Old City walk three or four blocks
10 with their kids, the people who live in
11 Chinatown or in Center City walk five or
12 six blocks with their kids and they enjoy
13 the park.

14 What's the difference between
15 that and the Viaduct development?

16 MR. CHIN: The Reading Viaduct
17 project is a project that is going to
18 require millions and tens of millions of
19 dollars.

20 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: Which in
21 New York it was done privately, by the
22 way, just for the record.

23 MR. CHIN: What I would say to
24 you is that during the years that this
25 project continues to move forward to try

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2 to get some traction with funding, this
3 legislation, this asking people --
4 requiring people to pay taxes toward the
5 Neighborhood Improvement District in
6 hopes of creating this park above ground,
7 PCDC has so many priorities and focuses
8 at the street level, and our first
9 priority and focus is making sure that
10 the families that live in the
11 neighborhood get the basic necessities,
12 like a roof over their homes. Our
13 biggest priority is affordable housing
14 for the many low-income families living
15 in the community.

16 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: So your
17 suggestion is the development of the
18 Viaduct is going to supplant any
19 resources going to affordable housing or
20 to -- I don't understand the nexus
21 really. I mean, I understand in the
22 middle of this vibrant or trying to be
23 vibrant neighborhood is this hulking
24 rusted metal mess that can be converted
25 into something that's beautiful and

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2 attractive and even a place where people
3 want to come and see it from other
4 neighborhoods. I don't understand what
5 the nexus is between these folks' desire
6 to tax themselves, taking out some of the
7 people that you're talking about out of
8 the bill, and why is that ultimate
9 development of that Viaduct such a
10 negative thing for the City? If they
11 thought that way in New York, New York
12 would be -- wouldn't be a very desirous
13 place to be.

14 MR. CHIN: I'll take it one
15 step further and I'll tell you that the
16 Viaduct, if you look on the map,
17 transverses the community and it sits on
18 properties that could be developed.
19 There's still structures that could be
20 taken down, and if they're taken down,
21 you open up huge lots available for
22 development, especially for affordable
23 housing. And that's our tie-in with the
24 Reading Viaduct.

25 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: I hear you.

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2 I don't understand it, and I respectfully
3 don't understand the nexus between the
4 two. And the excitement that's being
5 generated in New York and in West
6 Philadelphia over these types of
7 projects, to me it would seem something
8 that would raise property values, raise
9 real estate taxes, bring people to the
10 community, people would come and eat in
11 the restaurants. I don't understand the
12 focus on the Viaduct, but that's -- we'll
13 move forward.

14 COUNCILMAN DiCICCO: Thank you,
15 Mr. Chairman.

16 Just picking up on Councilman
17 Kenney's comments, if a portion of the
18 monies that the NID will generate is used
19 for lighting and maintenance, cleaning of
20 the areas below the Viaduct in the
21 neighborhood that you said the Viaduct is
22 traversing through part of the Chinatown
23 community, wouldn't that be a benefit to
24 the people who live in that community, to
25 have a much safer environment than exists

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2 today?

3 MR. CHIN: Yeah. I mean, I've
4 testified that we support cleaning and
5 greening. We don't oppose that. But you
6 have all these people sitting behind me
7 that are very concerned about the tax
8 increase and implications.

9 COUNCILMAN DiCICCO: I
10 understand that. If this was done
11 without any tax increase, probably
12 everybody would be singing Kumbaya out
13 there and everybody would be happy.

14 I want to go back to earlier
15 when we established that of the 44
16 percent, there are 20 percent of the
17 folks that would be left within this
18 boundary that would be part of the
19 Chinatown community. If you extract that
20 portion on the map that I show Hing Wah
21 Yuen and surrounding block or two from
22 that 20 percent, how many people are left
23 in the Chinatown community?

24 MR. CHIN: I mean, most of
25 these people here sitting behind me,

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2 these residents from Chinatown, do not
3 live in that green square block.

4 COUNCILMAN DiCICCO: I'm asking
5 percentages. You came in with a 44
6 percent. We got it down to 20 everything
7 south of Vine. North of Vine to
8 Callowhill, 10th Street east to 8th
9 Street, what percentage make up that 20
10 percent?

11 MR. CHIN: I can't tell you
12 where they all live.

13 COUNCILMAN DiCICCO: It's got
14 to be less than 20 percent.

15 (Audience yelling "more.")

16 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: We'll have
17 an opportunity -- let's go forward this
18 way. If the bill is amended today,
19 again, we have another required hearing.
20 People can figure out after looking at
21 the map whether they live in there or
22 they don't, and we'll know.

23 COUNCILMAN DiCICCO: Before you
24 go on, one other question.

25 John, you mentioned in your

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2 testimony -- I think it was a question to
3 Councilwoman Reynolds Brown -- about you
4 view this -- and I'm paraphrasing -- you
5 view this development, this NID, for a
6 specific purpose, to develop the NID -- I
7 mean the Viaduct. I'm sorry; the
8 Viaduct. You and I and Cecilia and
9 others have been dealing with an issue to
10 build a community center in Chinatown.
11 There's state, possibly federal money,
12 NTI dollars are going in. Isn't that a
13 specific project?

14 MR. CHIN: That is a
15 specific --

16 COUNCILMAN DiCICCO: So should
17 the folks who live at 13th and Callowhill
18 object to that project because it doesn't
19 directly benefit them?

20 MR. CHIN: This is an
21 additional 7 percent real estate tax,
22 mandatory tax increase, that you're
23 asking the people to pay for a specific
24 project.

25 COUNCILMAN DiCICCO: All right.

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2 MR. REUBEN: Could I add one
3 thing?

4 COUNCILMAN DiCICCO: But the
5 community center is a specific
6 development?

7 MR. CHIN: Yes, it is.

8 COUNCILMAN DiCICCO: Thank you.

9 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: Yes, sir.
10 Please identify yourself again.

11 MR. REUBEN: Yes. Again, my
12 name is Gary Reuben, and I didn't mention
13 that I happen to be an architect. I've
14 been a registered architect for over 30
15 years and I spent a substantial portion
16 of my professional career as a real
17 estate developer and an architect working
18 in affordable housing. In fact, one of
19 my projects involved rehabilitating, I
20 think it was, 10 or 12 houses in the 1500
21 block of Christian Street for affordable
22 homeownership, and I've done projects all
23 over the state. And I will say that I
24 think it's the wrong way to look at
25 affordable housing to say that affordable

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2 housing needs to be placed in blighted
3 areas. The best affordable housing I've
4 ever worked on are home projects that are
5 well integrated into the neighborhood and
6 integrated among the best neighborhoods.

7 In addition, while the cost --
8 and I can speak of this as an architect
9 and a developer. While the cost of
10 converting the Viaduct into a park, while
11 those costs are substantial, the costs of
12 demolishing the Viaduct are not
13 insubstantial in any way, and it strikes
14 me that there are plenty of opportunities
15 for affordable housing throughout the
16 neighborhood, not the least of which
17 remain within the right-of-way of the
18 Viaduct, parts of that right-of-way,
19 which wouldn't require the demolition of
20 the Viaduct in order to be developed as
21 affordable housing.

22 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: Thank you.

23 Any other questions for this
24 panel?

25 (No response.)

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2 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: Seeing
3 none, thank you very much.

4 Paul, you want to come back?
5 (Witness approached witness
6 table.)

7 MR. LEVY: Again, my name is
8 Paul Levy, Center City District.

9 I wanted to respond to the
10 question that Councilman Clarke raised
11 and Councilman DiCicco raised and just
12 talk the legal process here. What you
13 are doing, I believe, in this hearing is
14 authorizing the creation of an
15 organization, which is a Neighborhood
16 Improvement District. That Neighborhood
17 Improvement District has put together a
18 proposed plan and operating budget for
19 five years that specifically commits the
20 funds to ground level, street-level
21 maintenance and lighting, et cetera.
22 There is now going to be a public process
23 in which all the property owners get to
24 vote on that. So we'll find out what
25 people think on that.

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2 It would take a new plan and
3 budget of this organization to say, We
4 don't want to spend 40 or 60 percent on
5 clean and safe at street level, we want
6 to also maintain the Viaduct. So that
7 what is being asked to be approved by the
8 property owners is a plan for
9 ground-level maintenance, for lighting
10 and for those improvements and
11 potentially some looking at the future,
12 but overwhelmingly street-level
13 maintenance. The Board, in my
14 understanding, doesn't have the
15 unilateral authority to simply change how
16 that money is spent. They would have to
17 come back to the property owners in the
18 future, propose a new plan and budget,
19 and this Council would have to approve
20 it.

21 So what's being asked for here
22 is a plan for ground-level maintenance
23 and security. At such time, let's say,
24 we all dramatically succeed in the future
25 and raise the money to improve the

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2 Viaduct, the property owners would get a
3 second opportunity to vote, saying, We
4 like that and we want to help maintain
5 that. That is not what is in front of
6 people today. I think Councilman DiCicco
7 said this well. There are two things
8 going on here, the effort to create a NID
9 and a wish for the future that the
10 Viaduct could be something better. But
11 the operating money that's being proposed
12 in this budget is for street level. It
13 is not for capital improvements to the
14 Viaduct.

15 Thank you.

16 COUNCILMAN CLARKE: Thank you.

17 Thank you, Mr. Levy. Hold on, Mr. Levy.

18 So the question is, during the
19 course of the testimony, this whole issue
20 about the Viaduct continues to come up,
21 and I think it was indicated that it was
22 actually referenced in the ordinance. I
23 have not seen that particular reference
24 in the ordinance because I didn't read it
25 in its entirety. So based on what you're

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2 saying, one, has that been communicated
3 to all of the residents and will that be
4 communicated in a subsequent community
5 meeting hopefully in all parts of this
6 targeted area so people are clear that
7 based on the plan that's presented and
8 that will be authorized by the
9 authorization of the NID, it does not
10 target any direct funding to the Viaduct?
11 So if that's the case, then it seems like
12 that particular issue is off the table.

13 MR. LEVY: I believe the
14 confusion was created because in the sort
15 of aspiration statements in the
16 paragraphs at the beginning, it talks
17 about future improvements, but the budget
18 section, which is the binding section, is
19 very explicit that the money is being
20 spent to street-level improvements. So,
21 I mean, I'm not the proponent of it. The
22 neighborhood is, if they wanted to
23 redraft that or if Council wanted to
24 clarify that. But clearly this
25 neighborhood is looking to the future and

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2 the City, and we and others are looking
3 at how money could be raised. Obviously
4 that Viaduct is largely owned by the
5 Reading Company. They must be part of
6 that conversation. We're planning
7 someone else's property here. Let's be
8 clear about that. So that obviously is a
9 much longer process. I think it's just
10 the confusion in drafting. The budget is
11 very explicit as to what the money is to
12 be spent on.

13 COUNCILMAN CLARKE: My concern
14 is sometimes when we deal with
15 aspirational language in a legislation,
16 it can sometimes impact legislation,
17 negatively or positively. So what I'm
18 saying is that if it's based on the
19 aspirational language in the draft or
20 whatever, it creates a negative spin on
21 the opportunity to pass legislation, if
22 the people choose so to be supportive of
23 it -- because at the end of the day, they
24 get to determine that -- then maybe it
25 would be better if that were not in this

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2 particular proposal. Ultimately, again,
3 the community and the Councilman who
4 represents the area will make that
5 determination.

6 You've answered my second
7 question in terms of the Board opting to
8 make some changes in terms of where those
9 dollars will be targeted. You have to
10 start an entirely new process --

11 MR. LEVY: Yeah.

12 COUNCILMAN CLARKE: -- on the
13 Board level to authorize a change in the
14 plan?

15 MR. LEVY: Generally, yes. I
16 mean, I think if there's an outlet, say,
17 if they had 10 percent of their money for
18 planning for the future, they might do a
19 little bit of work on the Viaduct within
20 that number. But you cannot as a Board
21 under either the BID or the neighborhood
22 legislation dramatically deviate from the
23 budget that's been approved by the
24 property owners and this Council. They
25 have no unilateral authority to do that

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2 apart from the mandated process. So I
3 think that provides a protection that I
4 think would address many of the concerns
5 I heard expressed here.

6 COUNCILMAN CLARKE: Okay.

7 Thank you, Mr. Chair.

8 MR. LEVY: Thank you.

9 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: Thank you
10 very much.

11 Thank you, Mr. Levy.

12 Cherry Wong, James Morton,
13 Shirley Young and Yue Ling Le.

14 (Witnesses approached witness
15 table.)

16 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: Whoever is
17 prepared to begin, please identify
18 yourself for the record and proceed with
19 your testimony. Pull that microphone
20 close to you. It's easier to hear.

21 MS. YOUNG: I'll try.

22 Hi. My name is Shirley Young.
23 I am a resident as part of the Hing Wah
24 Yuen Homeowners' Association. I'm also
25 the President of the Hing Wah Yuen

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2 Homeowners' Association. We've been at
3 Hing Wah Yuen since 1998, and pretty much
4 we're part of Chinatown North.

5 Now, there are some things that
6 I really am really concerned about the
7 bill being introduced. One of them was
8 that I didn't receive any mailings from
9 the official notice. I believe out of
10 our 51 homeowners that make up the Hing
11 Wah Yuen homeowners, only one person
12 received the mailing. Nobody else has.

13 With the Callowhill Reading
14 Neighborhood Improvement District, they
15 have said they talked and tried to
16 communicate with us. I communicated with
17 them starting in June. This ordinance
18 was submitted back in April/May. I'm
19 concerned about that. That makes me
20 nervous pretty much.

21 If you're asking me to pay a
22 tax, asking my neighbors, my homeowners
23 as part of Hing Wah Yuen, to pay a tax
24 and we don't find out until after all
25 this is submitted, that makes me very

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2 concerned. I've asked about why we
3 didn't get any mailings of the official
4 notices. I got no response back for that
5 as to why. I get my tax bill. I don't
6 understand the other thing.

7 The other thing is that as a
8 homeowners' association, we pay fees to
9 clean up our property, to clean up our
10 area. We have landscape, the green
11 space. It's great, you know. We've had
12 problems with vandalism, graffiti, and we
13 pay that, and we have trash issues that
14 we address. So our homeowners'
15 association are already paying into that
16 already existing. So here you have this
17 NID that's saying, Okay, you're going to
18 have to pay more to do the same things
19 pretty much. I view it as that with the
20 spending of that.

21 The other thing is with
22 vandalism, the security issue, you're
23 addressing to say let's pay more money to
24 clean up the place, to keep cleaning up
25 the place, but I don't think you're

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2 really addressing -- the real issue would
3 be what's causing the place to get messy.
4 We have nuisance bars, nuisance
5 nightclubs. We've got other people in
6 that neighborhood that are contributing
7 to making our streets unclean and needs
8 to be picked up. So instead of trying to
9 keep throwing -- asking us to throw all
10 this money in to clean something, why
11 can't we really fix the source of the
12 problem that I feel I see?

13 I've been here ten years.

14 We've had a security system in place at
15 Hing Wah Yuen that's been broken more
16 than three times. Right now we have to
17 upgrade our system to try to fix it to
18 get new stuff to get security. We're
19 already doing what the NID is kind of
20 written in here.

21 I do have a concern about when
22 I read this back, that I really think
23 there's no definite to say what the
24 Viaduct -- the funding of my money would
25 go to the Viaduct or not. There is

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2 nothing really to tell me that.

3 There's a lot of things I want
4 to say. I think average round-about we
5 pay around 3,000 in taxes. So the first
6 year would be 7 percent, but according to
7 the ordinance written, it can increase
8 every year 5 percent. So by the end of
9 the five years or the third year, we go
10 up to 17 percent. That basically can say
11 for Hing Wah Yuen for the homeowners, for
12 51 homeowners, we can go up to \$26,000 as
13 a group of homeowners. The tax per
14 homeowner, if I'm saying around 3,000 for
15 the taxes, \$510 a year. Most of the
16 homeowners that are consistent of Hing
17 Wah Yuen Homeowners are working family.
18 They're working harder, hard enough
19 trying to even pay our fees, and we're
20 really trying to, I guess, be effective
21 in our spending, in our expenses. We
22 have our whole Board of Directors is
23 volunteer, pretty much the same set-up.
24 I'm learning being part of Board of
25 Directors from 1998. I've been part of

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2 the Board of Directors or some sort of
3 part of the Board of Directors since Hing
4 Wah Yuen was settled. I like where I'm
5 at. I want to say there.

6 I'm not against keeping the
7 streets clean and lighting, but I don't
8 see how paying more money to clean the
9 streets, when we have people at 3:00 a.m.
10 in the morning trashing our neighborhoods
11 and nobody to address the issues there.
12 We have cars driving wrong ways on
13 Callowhill, just rampant stuff going on.
14 I know as a homeowner, I've called
15 Nuisance, I've called state police, but
16 it's like you got to keep calling them.
17 There has to be something more effective.

18 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: Please
19 identify yourself for the record.

20 MS. CHERRY WONG: Good morning.
21 My name is Cherry Wong, but I request
22 Chinese interpreter, because my English
23 is not that great.

24 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: Do we have
25 someone who is willing to interpret?

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2 Anyone?

3 Ma'am, could you do me a favor
4 and take -- I'm sorry. The first
5 witness, could you just take a seat right
6 there, Ms. Young, so that the interpreter
7 can use the microphone to interpret. And
8 just do me a favor, just pull the
9 microphone back and forth to each other.

10 INTERPRETER: My name is Cherry
11 Wong. I live at 903-A Wood Street.

12 I oppose the City bill, City
13 Council Bill No. 110307. I live out of
14 very low income condition right now. I
15 don't have an American degree. I don't
16 speak good English. I'm living a very
17 hard life and making very low income.
18 Now everywhere is laying off workers and
19 they're reducing working hours. I used
20 to work five days a week. Now I'm
21 working three or four days a week. But
22 the price for the goods are rising
23 significantly.

24 The real estate tax, it's
25 increasing 10 percent every year, and

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2 this year we are starting to pay the
3 additional 3.75 to School District.

4 We will pay whatever we ought
5 to pay, but it's cost pressure on us.
6 But I cannot afford the actual 7 percent.
7 And the government have starting cut all
8 the welfares, especially the medical
9 insurance. So we have to pay a lot
10 actual on the medical expenses.

11 It's not only me. There are a
12 lot of people in my neighborhood living
13 in this similar condition, and so the tax
14 will make us -- make the condition worse.

15 We would like to see a greener
16 city and a safer environment, but this
17 should be the responsibility of the
18 government. Every one of us is paying
19 for the tax every day. So our government
20 should be responsible to give us a safe
21 and clean living environment, but not to
22 pass this duty to ourselves. We want
23 more job opportunities and more benefits
24 and to help us to live through the
25 hardship.

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2 That's it.

3 MS. CHERRY WONG: Thank you.

4 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: Thank you

5 very much. Just let me say from the
6 outset, thank you for your testimony, and
7 the issue of language is not important
8 here. It's not like ordering a cheese
9 steak. We accept multiple languages here
10 and we love our multi-cultural
11 communities. So you can come in here
12 with any language you like to speak and
13 we'll interpret or figure it out some
14 way. But thank you for your testimony.

15 Can we get her exact address
16 again, because we lost it when...

17 MS. CHERRY WONG: 903-A Wood
18 Street.

19 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: What
20 street?

21 INTERPRETER: Wood Street.

22 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: Oh, Wood.
23 Thank you very much. Thank you for your
24 testimony.

25 Sir, could you please identify

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2 yourself for the record.

3 Could you give him the
4 microphone. Thank you.

5 MR. MORTON: My name is James
6 Morton and I live at 1238 Callowhill
7 Street.

8 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: Please
9 proceed.

10 MR. MORTON: I've been living
11 there since 1997. I guess I consider
12 myself a community member. I'm not an
13 organizer. I don't have any particular
14 expertise.

15 I'm older. I'm retired. I'm
16 living on a fixed income. That means
17 that some months I don't have enough
18 money to buy all of the medicines that I
19 need. At my age I spend most of my
20 disposable cash on doctor visits and
21 medicines, and I'm at the point where
22 some months I have to go without and then
23 the next month I might get it, and
24 sometimes I take a pill every other day
25 instead of taking it every day. Pointing

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2 out, that's the way it is in your golden
3 years.

4 Now, I've heard people say that
5 the tax increase is trivial. Trivial to
6 them. It's significant to me. I'd like
7 to point out that what I've seen here
8 today is all the proponents of the NID,
9 save one, white, well-to-do, politically
10 connected, developers, know the
11 Councilman on a first-name basis. I'd
12 like to point out that you have one
13 clique that's pushing for this that has
14 vested interest, that are going to make a
15 lot of money. They want to increase
16 their perceived property values so they
17 can cash out.

18 I'd like to say that there's a
19 whole bunch of people here sitting with
20 me behind me who are not part of that
21 clique. We were not included in this
22 project. It was completely hidden from
23 us. No transparency. I never found out
24 about it until a couple weeks ago when it
25 had already been submitted through the

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2 Councilman's office. It's just
3 undemocratic and unfair the way the
4 proceeding has gone. They say that
5 they've reached out. I would have to beg
6 to differ, because I'm there every day
7 and I never had any knowledge that this
8 was going on. When there's a community
9 meeting, I attend it. I never had any
10 knowledge that this was going forward.

11 I'd like to say further that
12 the reason that's been given for this
13 NID -- oh, I'd like to say that it's not
14 really an NID. It is a Callowhill
15 Reading Viaduct Neighborhood Improvement
16 District. So right in the title it says
17 viaduct. So that gives me the impression
18 that the Viaduct is a significant part of
19 this.

20 So where was I? I'd just like
21 to -- to me it's like they have
22 developers, well-to-do people who want to
23 develop the Viaduct, who want to make it
24 appear as though it's like New York, and
25 that's fine, but my understanding of how

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2 capitalism should work is that these
3 people should form up a corporation and
4 sell shares and raise their own capital.
5 I don't think it's fair or right or
6 correct that myself and other poor folk
7 should have a tax put on us by those who
8 are well connected so that our money has
9 to go into their vanity project. I just
10 don't think that's fair.

11 Person after person has sat
12 here and said that, Well, we have
13 problems with graffiti, we have problems
14 with trash, we have problems with poor
15 lighting, et cetera. I don't have a car.
16 I live at 13th and Callowhill. I walk
17 everywhere I go. I don't have a problem
18 with graffiti. There's little graffiti
19 in the area. There's a minimum amount of
20 trash dumping. I don't have a problem
21 with trash, and I certainly don't have a
22 problem with lighting, and I'm out on the
23 streets, you know, all different hours
24 and so forth. So I'm saying that that's
25 being put forth as some kind of a straw

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2 man, because who could be opposed to
3 clean streets? Of course you want clean
4 streets, but under the guise of clean
5 streets, all this other stuff is being
6 slid in. I don't think that's right.

7 Furthermore, I'd like to say
8 that I've been there since '97. It's a
9 very diverse neighborhood, black people,
10 white people, Asian people, very wealthy
11 people, very poor people, and we've all
12 gotten along. As far as I can see,
13 there's no strife. I don't have a
14 problem with anybody in the neighborhood.
15 I've never seen any strife, friction
16 between any of the groups in the
17 neighborhood until now. This NID
18 proposal has polarized this community.
19 I've seen people screaming at each other.
20 They got thugs out on the street. If you
21 try to put up a sign for a community
22 meeting, they'll threaten you. They'll
23 rip your sign down. It's turned into
24 like a war zone. So the peacefulness in
25 the community has been completely

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2 destroyed, polarized by this small clique
3 of wealthy people who want this
4 neighborhood improvement district.

5 I'm completely opposed to this,
6 as I guess you can see. And furthermore,
7 the general question that was asked, am I
8 opposed to NID in general in concept,
9 yes, I am. Now, I don't know much about
10 it. I'm not a community developer. I
11 don't have a lot of education. But as I
12 see it, it balkanizes your city. Certain
13 neighborhoods where the people have some
14 money, they can get these services, but
15 up in North Philly or ghetto areas where
16 the people don't have money, well, they
17 got to pick through the trash. So I
18 think that all this does is balkanize
19 your city, and I think that's wrong.

20 Thank you.

21 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: Thank you
22 for your testimony.

23 (Applause.)

24 MR. MORTON: That's my family.

25 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: Everyone

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2 has had their opportunity to testify at
3 length and I still have two more
4 witnesses.

5 MS. CHERRY WONG: I have one
6 more question, only one question for
7 Mr. DiCicco.

8 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: Would you
9 like the interpreter back again?

10 MS. CHERRY WONG: I think it
11 would be better.

12 Mr. DiCicco -- I'm sorry. I
13 need to speak Chinese.

14 INTERPRETER: Mr. DiCicco --

15 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: You have to
16 speak closer to the microphone, please.

17 INTERPRETER: Mr. DiCicco, her
18 question is, do we really need the
19 improvement of this -- to this
20 neighborhood?

21 MS. CHERRY WONG: Does this
22 neighborhood really, really need
23 improvement you're talking about?

24 COUNCILMAN DiCICCO: In my
25 opinion, yes.

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2 But I think it's important that
3 you point out to the young lady that the
4 home that she lives in, the block in
5 which her home is located will be removed
6 from the legislation that's part of the
7 amendment. Hing Wah Yuen, 903 Wood will
8 not be in the NID.

9 MS. CHERRY WONG: Thank you.
10 But still the question is, if you think
11 we really need to do this, why the
12 government didn't do for us? Why we need
13 to do it ourselves? It's not my job.

14 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: He's not
15 going to defend himself. That is not a
16 fair statement, because I've been here
17 with him for 16 years, almost -- well, 17
18 years, and I know the work that he's done
19 in the Chinatown community, and I suspect
20 that those people sitting in the front
21 row who he's worked with for all these
22 years would agree that there's been
23 resources brought to the Chinatown
24 community directly through him, and I
25 just really believe that that statement

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2 is just totally unfair. It's just
3 unfair. I've seen it happen. I voted on
4 it. We fought the stadium in Chinatown.
5 It's down in South Philly because we
6 stood up for Chinatown at the time.

7 And so to implicate or give the
8 impression that somehow he has ignored
9 this neighborhood is totally, totally
10 unfair. It's just unfair. Because I sat
11 over there when the Chinatown people
12 expressed their opinions about the
13 stadium. And the stadium is not in
14 Chinatown; it's in South Philadelphia.

15 I mean, I understand we
16 disagree on this point, but you can't in
17 any way talk about his work in that
18 neighborhood in a disparaging way,
19 because I'm not going to sit here as
20 Chairman and let that happen.

21 MS. YOUNG: I do have a
22 question. My name is Shirley Young.

23 You talked -- you made a
24 reference earlier to Franklin Square.
25 Now, I grew up in Chinatown as a kid and

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2 initially it went into bad shape, but I'm
3 not being specifically taxed to have --
4 when Franklin Square got renovated and
5 now is a great viable park.

6 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: Your tax
7 dollars went into the project.

8 MS. YOUNG: And that's
9 everybody, not --

10 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: Now, after
11 we read the amendments, you will not be
12 specifically taxed for this project. So
13 there's really no complaint left.

14 MS. YOUNG: Let me make my
15 point. Okay? The Franklin Square was
16 City tax dollars. The NID is specific to
17 tax dollars. So basically, okay, in the
18 zone, in this -- hold on. I'm not
19 finished yet. They're going to give
20 improvements to their streets and their
21 cleaning, but then my side won't.

22 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: That's an
23 unfortunate position --

24 MS. YOUNG: But why can't the
25 City pay to clean the streets? I mean,

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2 I'm paying taxes. Why --

3 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: They and
4 their and them and them, it's just really
5 degenerating into a really sad commentary
6 on this discussion. Have you ever heard
7 of the Old City Service District?

8 MS. YOUNG: Yes.

9 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: Their
10 people pay money, extra money over and
11 above what they normally pay, to maintain
12 that neighborhood where Franklin Square
13 sits. So, I mean, we can go on splitting
14 hairs all day long. If you're not happy
15 with the bill, I understand, I hear you,
16 but, I mean, you're not even going to be
17 in the district, so what's the problem?

18 MS. YOUNG: I don't
19 understand --

20 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: You're not
21 in it.

22 COUNCILMAN DiCICCO: Can I ask
23 a question, ma'am?

24 MS. YOUNG: But it's not that.
25 You don't understand my question, though.

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2 COUNCILMAN DiCICCO: Ms. Young,
3 you mentioned earlier that the
4 Homeowners' Association and Hing Wah Yuen
5 pays an assessment for those services
6 that would be duplicated under NID,
7 although you're not going to be in the
8 NID. What is the annual assessment on
9 average for the average homeowner?

10 MS. YOUNG: On average or what
11 we collect annually or monthly?

12 COUNCILMAN DiCICCO: How many
13 units, 51 units?

14 MS. YOUNG: Yes.

15 COUNCILMAN DiCICCO: How much
16 do you collect annually?

17 MS. YOUNG: Hold on. Let me
18 get the number out for you.

19 COUNCILMAN DiCICCO:
20 Approximately.

21 MS. YOUNG: We're about like
22 140 a month.

23 COUNCILMAN DiCICCO: A hundred
24 and forty dollars a month per house?

25 MS. YOUNG: Per household.

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2 COUNCILMAN DiCICCO: So the
3 same benefits that the NID would supply,
4 you'd be entitled to if you were in the
5 NID, on average, if the numbers I
6 remember are somewhat correct, would be
7 about \$138 a year.

8 MS. YOUNG: But we're still
9 having that right now. You're adding --

10 COUNCILMAN DiCICCO: No, no.
11 Wouldn't it make more financial sense for
12 the people who are living in Hing Wah
13 Yuen to opt into the NID and pay \$140 a
14 year as opposed to paying \$140 a month
15 for the same services?

16 MS. YOUNG: But that's going to
17 increase 5 percent year after year.

18 COUNCILMAN DiCICCO: It's for
19 five years. It's for five years, it
20 would be -- I'm rounding the number
21 off -- I think it was 138 and some change
22 for Hing Wah Yuen. Your residents would
23 be saving \$140 times 11.

24 MS. YOUNG: But that's
25 because --

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2 COUNCILMAN DiCICCO: Fifteen
3 hundred dollars a year.

4 MS. YOUNG: But the
5 decision-making is directly with the
6 residents.

7 COUNCILMAN DiCICCO: I
8 understand, but you said in your
9 testimony you don't see why the
10 homeowners and Hing Wah Yuen should have
11 to pay for services such as cleaning of
12 streets and lighting and all those things
13 that your association pays for that would
14 be part of the NID assessment. They're
15 already paying for it, you said. Why
16 should we pay twice.

17 If you were to go with the NID,
18 the homeowners would be saving
19 approximately \$1,500 a year for the same
20 services.

21 I'm not asking you to get into
22 the NID. I just don't understand the
23 logic.

24 MS. YOUNG: I guess I'm getting
25 a little bit confused now.

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2 MR. MORTON: Well, if they're
3 not in it, if they're excluded from it,
4 then it's a moot point.

5 MS. YOUNG: Well, hold on. I
6 mean --

7 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: Taking this
8 particular property out of the NID is not
9 in your best financial interest, because
10 you're going to be continuing to pay for
11 services you pay for privately that the
12 NID would pay for at a lower cost.
13 That's what it comes down to.

14 MS. YOUNG: It's also not being
15 able to be part of that decision-making.

16 COUNCILMAN DiCICCO: You would
17 be, but, again, he's right, it's a moot
18 point. With all due respect, Hing Wah
19 Yuen is out of the NID, so why are we
20 talking about Hing Wah Yuen? It's not in
21 the NID.

22 MS. YOUNG: Hold on. What Hing
23 Wah Yuen would like to see is a more --
24 we're always -- Hing Wah Yuen and the
25 neighbors are very close knit. We always

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2 try to improve it. We don't want the
3 dirty streets and stuff like that. So,
4 you know, you're saying, Well, if you're
5 not going to be in the NID, well, you're
6 going to just, you know, really -- you're
7 going to lose out on it.

8 COUNCILMAN DiCICCO: You're
9 going to continue to do what you have
10 been doing.

11 MS. YOUNG: But let me --

12 COUNCILMAN DiCICCO: You're
13 going to keep assessing your homeowners
14 \$140 a month.

15 MS. YOUNG: Now you're
16 interrupting me.

17 COUNCILMAN DiCICCO: And that's
18 your choice.

19 MS. YOUNG: Councilman, now
20 you're interrupting me.

21 MR. MORTON: It's a moot point.

22 MS. YOUNG: Let me speak,
23 please.

24 MR. MORTON: It's a moot point.

25 MS. YOUNG: Ninth Street --

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2 hold on.

3 MR. MORTON: It's a moot point.

4 MS. YOUNG: We're getting a new
5 city block laid out. It's being redone
6 to make it more walkable. That's with
7 City funds. This NID, when I read it, is
8 saying I'm going to pay extra money to do
9 that same thing.

10 COUNCILMAN DiCICCO: It's
11 project specific.

12 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: No, you're
13 not going to pay extra money because
14 you're coming out.

15 MR. MORTON: It's a moot point.

16 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: Sir, I
17 didn't agree with most of what you said,
18 but I do agree with that statement, it is
19 a moot point.

20 MR. MORTON: That's what I'm
21 trying to say.

22 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: Thank you
23 for your testimony.

24 Helen Psirakis and Dimitry
25 Bekas. Are they here?

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2 (Witnesses approached witness
3 table.)

4 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: After these
5 witnesses, is there anyone scheduled to
6 testify? Can I see -- just one? How
7 many more? Two, three. Anybody else?
8 This is going to be the last call.

9 (No response.)

10 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: Okay. I
11 have three more witnesses after this.

12 Please pull the microphone
13 close to you, identify yourself for the
14 record and proceed.

15 MS. PSIRAKIS: We completely
16 silent with that. Good evening.

17 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: I'm sorry.
18 Excuse me.

19 MR. PSIRAKIS: -- Italian
20 American accent.

21 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: Excuse me.
22 I would ask that all conversation stop.
23 Please be respectful to the witnesses.
24 It's been a long day, I know, but we're
25 getting through it. So please take your

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2 conversations in the hallway.

3 Please identify yourself for
4 the record.

5 MS. PSIRAKIS: My name is Helen
6 Psirakis. I live 1301 Vine Street on the
7 second floor.

8 My question is, for long, long,
9 long time ago, that area called, if I
10 pronounce okay, Skid Row area. How they
11 call? United States, of course,
12 Philadelphia. How come one park -- the
13 City build one park -- can clean the
14 name? All be convention, we'll clean the
15 name.

16 The taxes when they raise can
17 clean the name? How we can live over
18 there? The area is very low with so many
19 homeless. It's a homeless area. How can
20 we afford to raise the taxes? We need to
21 lower the taxes.

22 One park no help us. Don't
23 help me to open again my restaurant 40
24 years close, because the area is mad.
25 Can you do me favor to open my place

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2 after one you build the park? The
3 convention built so big convention and no
4 clean the area. We need to clean the
5 area first and raise the taxes and build
6 the park.

7 We don't need no park. We need
8 to survive, to live in a place. I'm
9 tired to sleep for 12 years weekends
10 under the bed because the bullet, the
11 drug dealers in front of my door. If you
12 go right now 13 and my door, you see so
13 dirty whom the people -- the homeless
14 people.

15 Can the City clean first the
16 area and then raise the taxes and then
17 you build big park? We don't need no
18 park. We need something really to
19 survive and live like human beings. We
20 no living like human beings. No. No.
21 If you doesn't understand me, come in,
22 somebody, to live with me for two days.

23 We don't need no park. We need
24 to clean the place, to make it safe, the
25 place. The area is bad.

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2 No taxes. No. Lower the
3 taxes. We no afford to raise the taxes.
4 We don't need no park either.

5 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: Thank you.

6 MS. PSIRAKIS: Thank you.

7 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: Thank you.

8 Please identify yourself for
9 the record.

10 MR. BEKAS: I'm Dimitry Bekas.
11 I'm owner of the restaurant business.
12 I'm 38 years in the area. I have three
13 different location of restaurants.

14 So these people, first of all,
15 working behind us. They're not tell us
16 we going to create this kind of problem,
17 number one.

18 Number two, these people that
19 have ten years free taxes there and after
20 ten years, they're going to leave the
21 area. They're not going to give it
22 nothing opportunity to us.

23 I got grand-kids. I got sons
24 who live in the area forever. No for
25 Temple area for today, like these people

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2 leave Temple area over there. And these
3 people try to make it behind our back
4 money. These people coming from another
5 place to use us.

6 Thank you very much. Not
7 supposed to pass that bill.

8 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: Thank you
9 for your testimony.

10 Who else was -- how many?
11 Because I had --

12 MR. CHIN: Three.

13 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: The record
14 is quite full, but -- I'm sorry. Yeah,
15 everybody has got a right to do it, a
16 chance to do it, but I just need to know
17 who it's going to be -- three more from
18 where?

19 (Witnesses approached witness
20 table.)

21 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: Please
22 identify yourself for the record.

23 MS. JULIE WONG: My name Julie
24 Wong. And the idea is very good, but
25 only one thing I think we cannot really

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2 afford for another 7 percent for the real
3 estate tax above what we are paying
4 almost 80-some thousand already.

5 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: I'm sorry.
6 Please proceed. Do you have more? I'm
7 sorry.

8 MS. JULIE WONG: No. That's
9 all.

10 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: Oh, okay.
11 Thank you.

12 Sir, I'm sorry. You've
13 testified once already today.

14 MR. YUEN: I'm interpreting.

15 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: Oh, I'm
16 sorry. Thank you.

17 Is this the witness that needs
18 interpretation? Well, then, Julie, could
19 you please take one of the seats there
20 and let the gentleman sit there to
21 interpret.

22 Excuse me. Who is going to
23 interpret? Ms. Wong, are you going to
24 interpret?

25 MS. JULIE WONG: Yes.

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2 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: Please
3 identify yourself for the record.

4 INTERPRETER: She said that she
5 living in the Hing Wah Yuen residence.

6 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: No. I need
7 the lady's name, please.

8 MS. CONG: My name So Kin Cong
9 (ph).

10 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: Thank you.

11 INTERPRETER: She living in one
12 of the residence at Hing Wah Yuen.

13 She said that living over there
14 mostly is lower and middle-income person.
15 She said mostly are low income. She said
16 really I don't have qualified to stay in
17 the Hing Wah Yuen, living in the Hing Wah
18 Yuen, resident in the Hing Wah Yuen.

19 She stay very luckily under the
20 government subsidize. So that's the
21 reason I have in the resident in Hing Wah
22 Yuen, because subsidize.

23 She said I living in there
24 almost more than ten years. She said
25 everything is very quiet and peacefully.

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2 She said living there very happy. She
3 say why all the sudden going to increase
4 the property tax?

5 She say that I'm retired almost
6 13 years. She say that my income is SSI
7 and the income only. I'm 77 years old.
8 I don't have -- she say she don't have
9 income and she don't have working, she
10 not working. She say that really don't
11 have any ability to increase the tax.
12 She say that I definitely and I can't
13 stand the tax raise, raise the tax. She
14 say that she don't have any money to pay
15 that real estate tax, additional real
16 estate tax. Everybody don't want to pay
17 the additional tax.

18 She say right now the income
19 she have is very limited and she can't do
20 nothing anymore. She say the most
21 resident over there is low income and
22 they don't have any additional income and
23 they cannot afford additional tax.

24 She say that she really don't
25 understand why they need to pay

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2 additional tax. She say that she want to
3 know why we need to pay extra tax. She
4 say everybody agrees and no tax. She say
5 most in the back -- she say that
6 everybody hope under no tax increase.

7 (Audience members yelling.)

8 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: Thank you.

9 (Audience members yelling.)

10 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: Thank you.

11 Could we ask, just so we can see, the
12 residents -- Julie, could you ask the
13 residents of Hing Wah Yuen to stand up,
14 please.

15 (Ms. Julie Wong interpreting.)

16 (Audience members standing.)

17 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: Thank you.

18 Thank you. Just for the record, all the
19 people standing will not be in the NID
20 and will not be paying extra taxes.
21 You're getting out today. We're amending
22 it out. We're amending your building out
23 today. There will be no concern for
24 increased taxes at the housing facility.
25 Okay?

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2 COUNCILMAN DiCICCO: Julie?

3 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: Are you
4 telling them they're coming out?

5 MS. JULIE WONG: Yes.

6 Hello?

7 (Ms. Julie Wong interpreting.)

8 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: Okay? So
9 no worries.

10 (Audience members yelling.)

11 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: Listen, I
12 understand. We cannot -- we're not going
13 to be able to complete this hearing
14 unless people stop speaking out. We need
15 to have quiet in order to proceed.

16 Do you have anything further to
17 add?

18 MS. JULIE WONG: Yeah. I say
19 how about 1037 Vine Street? We're being
20 taxed almost 80,000. Add about another
21 6,000, we cannot afford it.

22 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: At the end
23 of this hearing, we will read the
24 amendments, which will give you the new
25 boundaries of the NID, and you can decide

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2 for yourself whether -- you can know
3 clearly whether you're in or out.

4 MS. JULIE WONG: Okay.

5 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: Thank you.
6 Thank you for your testimony.

7 Yes, sir. Please identify
8 yourself for the record.

9 MR. KOOPMAN: Good morning,
10 Councilmembers. My name is Jeffrey
11 Koopman. My wife and I, Suzanne, we're
12 property owners at 429 North 13th Street.
13 We moved to Philadelphia 11 years ago.
14 We were drawn to that area initially
15 because of its urban landscape, its
16 industrial architecture and its
17 convenient location. We're just a few
18 blocks to the Reading Terminal Market,
19 676, 76, I-95, the Broad Street Line,
20 Chinatown with its dozens of great
21 restaurants and fascinating markets and
22 cultures and even City Hall where we
23 stand today. We found out rather quickly
24 that we didn't move into a neighborhood,
25 we moved into an area. Not just any

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2 area. Ours was dark from lack of
3 lighting, it was strewn with garbage and
4 graffiti and all of the unfortunate perks
5 that any area is rewarded with when it
6 receives decades of neglect and a blind
7 eye.

8 These perfect conditions
9 created an environment that encouraged
10 crime. It came in the form of
11 prostitution, open drug dealing and the
12 usual entourage of associates. One such
13 associate was so eager to welcome us to
14 the neighborhood he forcibly robbed my
15 wife.

16 What we also found out is that
17 there was hope, hope in the form of other
18 concerned neighbors who wanted to take it
19 upon themselves to create a real
20 neighborhood. The Callowhill
21 Neighborhood Association was soon formed.

22 We started and trained the
23 patrol for our very own community town
24 watch. We even scheduled neighborhood
25 clean-ups. Put simply, people who became

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2 neighbors got engaged to have a positive
3 impact on their own surroundings.

4 It's all too easy to sit back
5 and say it's the City's responsibility to
6 add additional lighting, they need to
7 help us work towards more green space,
8 they need to help clean up graffiti, they
9 need to keep the streets and sidewalks
10 clean and safe. And in many instances,
11 the City, particularly Councilman
12 DiCicco, has assisted us. But we need
13 more. The funds available to help us
14 improve and plan for the future of this
15 neighborhood are just not there right
16 now, nor do they look like they will be
17 there any time soon.

18 The creation and formation of
19 the Callowhill Reading Viaduct
20 Neighborhood Improvement District will
21 provide all of us who make this
22 neighborhood home with the opportunity to
23 stop saying the City needs to get this
24 done and turn it into we will get this
25 done.

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2 Our nephews are 4 and 6 years
3 old. They spend many weekends with us
4 exploring the City. When they visit, we
5 want to provide them with a sense of
6 safety, a sense of security and a place
7 to be young boys, and most of all, we
8 want those very same qualities of life
9 for our neighbors, in particular the
10 thousands of school children who come in
11 and out and reside in our neighborhood
12 every day.

13 As an individual, I respect
14 that there are some of you in this room
15 that may not want to get involved in the
16 Neighborhood Improvement District.
17 Volunteering your time for the betterment
18 of others requires a commitment. It
19 requires dedication, and it just isn't
20 for everyone. But you cannot deny the
21 mutual responsibility that we have to
22 ourselves, our community, our children
23 and our neighbors to do whatever it is
24 that we possibly can to make our
25 neighborhood a better place.

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2 I want to thank you for your
3 time. We strongly encourage you to pass
4 this resolution so, along with my
5 neighbors, we can get to work.

6 Thank you.

7 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: Thank you
8 very much for your commitment to the City
9 and for your testimony. And I guess
10 you're considered a newcomer after 13
11 years, right? Okay.

12 Please come forward and
13 identify yourself.

14 MR. CURRAN: My name is Bill
15 Curran. I've had an architectural metal
16 work, design and fabrication business in
17 this neighborhood for 11 years. I employ
18 two people. I also live here, I own
19 property here and I have a family here.

20 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: Excuse me.

21 Please take extraneous
22 conversation into the hallway so we can
23 get through this hearing. Thank you.

24 Please begin.

25 MR. CURRAN: With a background

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2 in architecture and interest in history
3 and a father who loved trains more than
4 anyone could imagine, this area was a
5 perfect fit for me. The architecture
6 tells a fascinating story of our
7 industrial past, and I'm not the only one
8 who thinks so. In June of 2010, the
9 National Park Service approved a section
10 of the proposed NID to be on the National
11 Register of Historic Places. This
12 historic district and its surrounding
13 traces the history of the industrial
14 architecture as it evolved over 100-plus
15 years from standard brick and wood beam
16 construction to elaborate use of concrete
17 and steel. It also contains examples of
18 buildings designed by some of the leading
19 American architects of the time, and the
20 Reading Viaduct built in the last part of
21 the 19th century referencing our nation's
22 critical period of growth through
23 railroads. My wife and I often enjoy
24 trying to imagine what this neighborhood
25 was like 75 or 100 years ago when the

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2 railcars pulled right up to the buildings
3 and trains were on multiple levels.

4 Sadly, the presence of large
5 amounts of trash and debris combined with
6 a lack of security prevents people from
7 fully appreciating the beauty of the
8 neighborhood.

9 I live two blocks away from
10 where I work, and as I walk to work,
11 there are these beautiful moments,
12 cobblestone streets, pie-shaped
13 brownstone buildings, barrel-vaulted
14 arched tunnels. The corner of Wood and
15 13th Street has the Packard Building, the
16 City's own morgue and the high building
17 where I can catch an almost pure glimpse
18 of Philadelphia, old Philadelphia. Of
19 course, I can only partially enjoy these
20 moments because if I enjoy them for too
21 long, I am bound to step into a ripped
22 plastic bag containing something
23 unspeakable, maybe trip over a
24 five-gallon container of used cooking oil
25 dumped from a neighboring restaurant or

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2 step on glass from a broken 40-ounce malt
3 liquor bottle.

4 Our history is undeniably an
5 important economic resource to the City.
6 I want tourists and people from the
7 surrounding neighborhoods to appreciate
8 the history of these buildings the way I
9 do, and I hope to see the next generation
10 of Philadelphians grow into the
11 neighborhood. I want to see these
12 buildings reused and preserved for the
13 quality of their architecture and the
14 quality of their construction and for the
15 piece of our history they describe.

16 With the situation as it is,
17 the chronic short dumping, severe litter
18 problems and security issues, it will be
19 very difficult for anyone but a few who
20 live here right now to enjoy these
21 features. And even this is quite limited
22 by the litter and crime.

23 Cleaning up the trash and
24 making the neighborhood more secure would
25 turn it from the iffy neighborhood with

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2 parking close to Center City to a place
3 people appreciate for its own sake, a
4 slice of Philadelphia's past that it
5 reveals.

6 I support the NID as a vehicle
7 for achieving that transformation. It's
8 good for the people who live here and
9 it's good for the City.

10 And thanks for hearing my
11 testimony.

12 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: Thank you
13 for your testimony.

14 That will conclude our public
15 hearing, and as I stated prior, there's a
16 need for a second public hearing that
17 will be -- notification will be sent out
18 for a second hearing.

19 We will now proceed to go into
20 a public meeting for the purposes of
21 amending this bill, which will be heard
22 again at the subsequent hearing in the
23 future. Forty-five days after the end of
24 that hearing, all the folks involved in
25 whatever this district is going to be,

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2 with the exception of what's being
3 amended out, will have a chance to vote
4 up or down on the establishment of the
5 NID. And that's that information.

6 Now, this amendment that has
7 been circulated to members of Council and
8 will be available in the Chief Clerk's
9 Office tomorrow does the following. It
10 eliminates the following language from
11 the mission statement. So please,
12 everyone, pay attention. This language
13 is coming out of the bill and will amend
14 the mission statement accordingly. This
15 is coming out: "In addition, we will
16 seek to reclaim the Reading Viaduct and
17 redevelop the structure into a park to be
18 used by residents and visitors of the
19 Greater Philadelphia area. As a
20 reclaimed public space, the Reading
21 Viaduct will successfully bring together
22 economically and culturally diverse
23 communities, generate economic
24 development and provide a catalyst for
25 the redevelopment of this section of

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2 North Philadelphia."

3 That language is being, once we
4 vote on it, is being removed from the
5 bill. It's out.

6 The second amendment will be an
7 amendment to the district itself, and the
8 following what I read is what the
9 district is proposed to be. So if
10 anybody wants to jot down the boundaries
11 so they can determine its impact on them,
12 I will read slowly, and this will also be
13 available in the Chief Clerk's Office by
14 request, I believe, tomorrow.

15 This is amending the mission
16 statement, Section 2. The new language
17 will read accordingly: "The service area
18 for the District includes taxable
19 properties listed in Exhibit A-2 and
20 located within the area bounded by the
21 northeast corner of Broad and Vine, the
22 southeast corner of Broad and Spring
23 Garden Streets, the southwest corner of
24 8th and Spring Garden Streets, the
25 southwest corner of 8th and Callowhill

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2 Streets, the southwest corner of 10th and
3 Callowhill Streets, the southwest corner
4 of 10th and Vine Streets and the
5 northeast corner of Broad and Vine and
6 certain blocks of intersecting streets,
7 except that those properties which have
8 frontage on North Broad Street shall not
9 be included in the District."

10 Those are the two amendments
11 that have been circulated to members of
12 the Committee and I would request someone
13 move their adoption.

14 COUNCILMAN DiCICCO: I move for
15 the adoption of the amendments.

16 (Duly seconded.)

17 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: It's been
18 moved and seconded.

19 All in favor?

20 (Aye.)

21 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: Are there
22 any opposed?

23 (No response.)

24 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: The ayes
25 have it. The bill will be amended

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2 accordingly.

3 There will be a notice sent out
4 for the next hearing of this Committee to
5 review this Bill 110307, and that will
6 conclude the business of the hearing of
7 the Rules Committee today.

8 Thank you for your attendance.

9 (Committee on Rules concluded
10 at 12:50 p.m.)

11 - - -

1
2 CERTIFICATE

3 I HEREBY CERTIFY that the
4 proceedings, evidence and objections are
5 contained fully and accurately in the
6 stenographic notes taken by me upon the
7 foregoing matter on September 20, 2011, and
8 that this is a true and correct transcript of
9 same.

10
11
12
13
14 -----
15 MICHELE L. MURPHY
16 RPR-Notary Public
17
18
19

20 (The foregoing certification of this
21 transcript does not apply to any reproduction
22 of the same by any means, unless under the
23 direct control and/or supervision of the
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