

Committee of the Whole
December 3, 2019

COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA
COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Room 400, City Hall
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Tuesday, December 3, 2019
2:35 p.m.

PRESENT:

COUNCIL PRESIDENT DARRELL L. CLARKE
COUNCILWOMAN CINDY BASS
COUNCILWOMAN JANNIE L. BLACKWELL
COUNCILMAN ALLAN DOMB
COUNCILMAN DEREK S. GREEN
COUNCILMAN WILLIAM K. GREENLEE
COUNCILWOMAN HELEN GYM
COUNCILMAN BOBBY HENON
COUNCILMAN KENYATTA JOHNSON
COUNCILMAN CURTIS JONES, JR.
COUNCILMAN DAVID OH
COUNCILMAN BRIAN J. O'NEILL
COUNCILWOMAN CHERELLE L. PARKER
COUNCILWOMAN MARIA D. QUINONES-SANCHEZ
COUNCILWOMAN BLONDELL REYNOLDS BROWN
COUNCILMAN MARK SQUILLA
COUNCILMAN AL TAUBENBERGER

BILLS: 190943, 190944

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2 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: First of all,
3 I would like to thank everyone for coming down
4 today. Some might say this is a relatively
5 significant moment. I probably would say that,
6 too.

7 I want to thank all the members in
8 particular who have worked on this initiative,
9 actually, a former member Councilman Goode
10 sitting over there. I remember Councilman Goode
11 sponsored a number of bills on the tax abatement
12 years ago. So, this is not something that just
13 happened to come up in the last moment as some
14 people are attempting to imply. Sorry, had to
15 take a shot.

16 So hopefully, we will have a thoughtful
17 discussion today. We would like to hear all
18 sides as we do in the City Council of
19 Philadelphia and come up with a reasonable
20 solution to an issue that continues to be hotly
21 debated and somewhat controversial and hotly
22 contested. At the end of the day, this Council
23 has been real good about being in a position to
24 come up with what people believe to be the most
25 reasonable approach to governing in the City of

1 Philadelphia.

2 So, I want to thank you all so much.

3 This is the hearing that's called to order. I
4 recognize the presence of a quorum of the
5 Committee of the Whole. This is the Public
6 Hearing on the committee. The purpose of this
7 hearing is to take testimony on Bills No. 190943
8 and 190944.

9 Mr. Christmas, would you please read the
10 title of the bills.

11 THE CLERK: Bill No. 190943: An
12 Ordinance amending Section 19-1301.1 of The
13 Philadelphia Code, entitled "Homestead
14 Exclusion," to increase the amount of the
15 homestead exclusion, under certain terms and
16 conditions.

17 And Bill No. 190944: An Ordinance
18 amending Chapter 19-1300 of The Philadelphia
19 Code, entitled "Real Estate Taxes," by modifying
20 the duration and/or amount of certain tax
21 abatements, and by providing for periodic
22 evaluation of the abatements authorized by
23 Sections 19-1303(2), 19-1303(3) and 19-1303(4),
24 all under certain terms and conditions.

25 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Thank you,

1 Mr. Christmas.

2 At this time, our first witnesses to
3 testify on Bill No. 190943 -- testifying on both
4 bills. Right now we have Mr. Rob Dubow, City
5 Finance Director and Mr. Uri Monson, the Chief
6 Financial Officer for the School District of
7 Philadelphia.

8 (Approaches Witness Table.)

9 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Mr. Engler,
10 are you testifying, also?

11 MR. ENGLER: On 944.

12 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: On the next
13 bill. Okay. Thank you.

14 Good afternoon. Please proceed.

15 MR. DUBOW: Good afternoon, Council
16 President, Members of City Council. Rob Dubow,
17 Finance Director joined by Jim Engler, Chief of
18 Staff to Mayor Kenney; Uri Monson from the
19 School District. I'm here to testify in
20 opposition to Bill No. 190943.

21 The legislation would raise the
22 Homestead Exemption from the existing \$45,000 to
23 \$50,000 starting for Tax Year 21. The Homestead
24 Exemption is available to anyone who owns a
25 property in Philadelphia for whom the property

1 in question is the primary residence. As you
2 know, the Homestead was increased earlier this
3 year from 40 to 45,000. And the earlier changes
4 to the Homestead were made in part to help
5 offset increases in property assessments.

6 The proposed increase in this bill is
7 not coupled with any change in assessment, and
8 has substantial costs to the City's General Fund
9 and to the School District. The combined FY21
10 costs to the City and School District would be
11 about 15.4 million with about 8.5 million, that
12 cost being born by the District. The District's
13 Five Year Plan already assumes it will begin
14 incurring deficits in FY22. This bill would
15 exacerbate those deficits.

16 Given the anticipated financial impact
17 of the bill, we would want to -- we would want
18 any revisions to the Homestead Exemption to be
19 weighed against other priorities as part of the
20 FY21 budget process and to be considered in the
21 context of any change in assessed values.

22 That concludes my testimony. And we're
23 available to answer any questions you might
24 have.

25 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Thank you

1 very much.

2 Mr. Monson.

3 MR. MONSON: Good afternoon, Council
4 President Clarke, Members of the Committee. My
5 name is Uri Monson. I'm the Chief Financial
6 Officer for the School District of Philadelphia.
7 I'm here to explain the impact on the School
8 District of the ordinances to amend the code
9 regarding the Homestead Exclusion and regarding
10 the City's Real Estate Tax Abatement Program.

11 I want to begin by briefly addressing
12 proposed increase in the Homestead Exclusion.
13 Last June, I testified regarding a similar bill
14 to increase the exemption, and noted the
15 negative impact to the District of any such
16 change as significant. We estimate the proposal
17 here today would cost the District about 9 and a
18 half million in '21; about \$50 million over the
19 life of our Five Year Plan.

20 For perspective, 9 and a half million
21 dollars, equivalent to the annual costs of 79
22 teachers' salaries.

23 Last year, the City was able to
24 designate funds to keep the School District
25 whole relative to the eventual change of the

1 Homestead Exclusion that was adopted in June.
2 And we would hope the City would take the same
3 approach to any future changes to the Homestead
4 Exemption.

5 The proposed changes to the Real Estate
6 Tax Abatement Program would have a positive
7 short-term impact on the School District's
8 budget allowing for the collection of revenues
9 not currently received in years two to ten of
10 the ten-year tax abatement.

11 In Fiscal Year '18, the District's
12 revenues from real estate taxes are reduced by
13 just over \$61 million as a result of the current
14 residential and commercial tax abatement
15 programs. According to the research conducted
16 by eConsult on behalf of City Council, the
17 District would expect to realize an additional
18 \$148 million in revenues over the next ten years
19 if the proposed ordinance is passed.

20 Recently, with the help of the Mayor,
21 this Council and through smart fiscal financial
22 management, the School District has been able to
23 return to fiscal stability, allowing for Moody's
24 to upgrade the District to investment grade for
25 the first time since 1977, and Fitch to upgrade

1 the District to two notches this past October.
2 These additional funds would be the sustainable
3 recurring predictable revenues in which the
4 District relies in order to make investments in
5 our students, staff and schools.

6 I think it's important to know it will
7 be crucial to continue to review the impacts of
8 these amendments in the performance of the Tax
9 Abatement Program going forward on a routine
10 basis. I was an assistant budget director for
11 the City when the current abatement programs are
12 first enacted over twenty years ago. And have
13 used the City's taxation system through a
14 variety of lenses over that period.

15 The Abatement Program, like other
16 incentive programs -- TIFs, KOZs, exemptions --
17 are all exceptions to the tax code which are
18 presumably initiated to provide some type of
19 economic activity in the City or correct for
20 recognized disadvantage to the tax code. While
21 it would take time to determine whether or not
22 the amendments proposed in this ordinance will
23 have impact on construction and home improvement
24 activity in Philadelphia, studies have shown we
25 can expect some impact.

1 It's always challenging to construct the
2 "but/for" analysis, what would have happened
3 under a different set of circumstances. Would
4 greater funding improve the quality of our
5 public schools, also potentially driving up real
6 estate values regardless of any tax abatement?

7 With the eConsult study, a baseline has
8 been established, which should be utilized to
9 evaluate the impact of these amendments and the
10 tax abatement reconsidered in whole or in part
11 within some defined period of time.

12 This concludes my testimony. And I am
13 happy to answer any questions you may have.

14 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Thank you.

15 You are on the next bill, right? Want
16 to do it now?

17 MR. ENGLER: Up to you.

18 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Might as
19 well.

20 MR. ENGLER: Good afternoon, Council
21 President Clarke and Members of City Council.
22 My name is James Engler, Chief of Staff to Mayor
23 Kenney. I am joined by Rob Dubow, City Finance
24 Director and Anne Fadullon, Director of Planning
25 and Development. I am here to testify on Bill

1 No. 190944.

2 This legislation would modify the
3 existing ten-year Real Estate Tax Abatement for
4 certain new construction, creating an annual 10
5 percent step-down scale over the course of ten
6 years. This change would be applied for an
7 initial abatement application submitted on after
8 July 1, 2020. Each year, each new abatement
9 would step down an additional 10 percent so
10 properties would have a 100 percent abatement
11 the first year and 90 percent abatement the
12 second year, 80 percent the third year and so
13 on. After the tenth and final year, the
14 abatement would terminate.

15 The Abatement Program was implemented to
16 spur construction development in the City and
17 strengthen what was a very weak market.
18 Numerous studies have shown the Abatement
19 Program helped achieved that goal.
20 Implementation of the abatement helped to drive
21 investment building production, including both
22 new construction and rehabilitation. In turn,
23 the abatement helped to strengthen the City's
24 real estate market and boost the City's property
25 tax base overall.

1 Studies also note, however, that the
2 market has changed since the abatement was first
3 implemented. And we agree, the abatement is
4 worth revisiting in light of these market
5 changes. We also strongly support the
6 requirement that the abatement be reevaluated
7 every three years.

8 Studies have also concluded that
9 elimination or reduction of the existing
10 abatement would lead to reduction in
11 construction activity, which would be
12 accompanied by a loss of development, employment
13 and related tax revenue over the long term.
14 Over a 20 or 30-year period, the current
15 abatement is projected to generate more
16 development, create more jobs and raise more tax
17 revenue than scenarios to modify or decrease the
18 incentive.

19 In addition, outside studies also show
20 short-term revenue gains following the reduction
21 or elimination of the abatement. At some point,
22 however, there is a crossover. After which, the
23 City and School District begin to lose revenue.
24 The Department of Revenue analyzed the proposed
25 reduction scenario in this legislation and it's

1 likely impacts over the next 20 years starting
2 in 2021. This analysis found an anticipated
3 short-term increase in Real Estate Tax revenues,
4 which is expected to peak at \$56 million in
5 2030. After that peak, the increase is expected
6 to decrease each year leading to a loss of over
7 \$15 million in 2040.

8 Over a ten-year period, this is expected
9 to reduce construction volume by over 12,000 new
10 properties as compared to the status quo. Over
11 the 20-year period, the change in construction
12 volume is expected to grow to a reduction of
13 over 28,000 new properties.

14 While we remain concerned about the loss
15 of long-term revenue and the possible negative
16 impacts a change would have on development,
17 employment and other City revenues, we
18 understand the concerns of residents who view
19 the current abatement structure as unfair. We
20 support a change to the abatement with a
21 percentage phased out over a period of years but
22 with a few caveats.

23 First, we strongly believe that the
24 legislated periodic evaluations be conducted
25 jointly by City Council and the Administration.

1 Additionally, we have concerns that the
2 effective date of July 1, 2020 could have
3 significant negative impacts on the development
4 projects currently in the final planning
5 phrases. We would respectfully request that the
6 effective date be adjusted to July 1, 2021 to
7 allow for both the City and developers to better
8 plan for implementation of this change.

9 That concludes my testimony. And we are
10 available to answer any questions you may have.

11 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Thank you
12 very much for your testimony. I have a couple
13 of quick questions.

14 Homestead. Would you acknowledge that
15 the Homestead has been probably the most
16 effective way to offset increasing numbers as it
17 relates to existing residents and neighbors to
18 offset, in most cases, the increase in taxes
19 based on new construction?

20 MR. DUBOW: It has been --

21 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: I know that's
22 a loaded question. In reality, when you look at
23 neighborhoods, you go to Francisville, you go to
24 Brewerytown, you go to Point Breeze, these
25 neighborhoods where there's been significant

1 levels of ten-year tax abated new construction,
2 the property values on existing properties are
3 going up dramatically. And I think that's why
4 having Homestead would be in support of, you
5 know, mitigating any negative impacts of that to
6 a degree.

7 Would you acknowledge that?

8 MR. DUBOW: I think the Homestead has
9 been valuable in offsetting increases in
10 assessments. And it's been -- those increases
11 have been coupled with changes in assessments
12 before. Meaning, it's our most widely used
13 relief program, about 220,000 properties. So,
14 that has been one of the big benefits of the
15 Homestead, yes.

16 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: All right.
17 Then our ability to locally put in place
18 measures that will allow us to support existing
19 residents are quite limited. Probably
20 Homestead, maybe one or two other small
21 measures?

22 MR. DUBOW: So, there's Homestead --

23 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Because OPA
24 just want to do what OPA has consistently done
25 unless we change it. But it's been problematic

1 for a lot of residents.

2 MR. DUBOW: There are a number of relief
3 programs in addition to Homestead. There is the
4 LOOP Program. There are payment plans which hit
5 the lowest income levels, actually have zero
6 payment options.

7 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Right.

8 MR. DUBOW: So, there are other relief
9 programs, too.

10 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Would you
11 acknowledge that LOOP has certain qualifiers?
12 Must have lived in the property for a certain
13 period of time, income. Homestead is for
14 everybody that owns and occupies the house.

15 MR. DUBOW: For everybody --

16 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: So, that's
17 the most effective.

18 MR. DUBOW: Right. Regardless of
19 income, regardless of anything else. As long as
20 you own the property and live in it, you can get
21 a Homestead.

22 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: All right.
23 Okay. I just want to make sure we on the same
24 page on that.

25 Mr. Engler, you referenced this figures

1 over a period of time. You, actually,
2 referenced 2039 as the year where there will
3 potentially be some negative impact on any
4 changes. And I will say here today, I guarantee
5 you, I will not be the Council President in
6 2039. I know that might make a lot of people
7 happy. They may want me to accelerate that
8 date. But 2039, I am not going to be the
9 Council President, all right.

10 But over that same time period until we
11 get to 2039, we are looking at around
12 \$420 million in projected revenue going towards
13 our schools and our City to help with services
14 and existing homeowners and making sure our
15 children live in a safe environment. Just want
16 to acknowledge that.

17 MR. ENGLER: Yes. And I think I
18 acknowledged in the testimony, there are revenue
19 gains in the short term. I think that's what
20 every study has shown.

21 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Short-term?
22 Are you talking about from 2020 to 2038
23 short-term?

24 When you say short-term, I am trying to
25 understand what's short-term.

1 MR. ENGLER: So, what I reference in
2 there is where you get to the crossover point,
3 which is what economists have looked over that
4 said, where does the revenue cross over? Where
5 do we see actually a reduction revenue with the
6 change?

7 So, if you were to continue the current
8 abatement structure, you would see increased
9 revenue. If you were to change it, how you
10 would change it would increase revenue over a
11 certain period of time. It could be ten years.
12 It could be twenty years depending on the type
13 of change that you would implement. And you
14 would see increased revenue.

15 The question is, what happens after
16 that? And what JLL who looked at it two years
17 ago, I guess it was now, a year and a half ago,
18 found there is a crossover point no matter what
19 change you were to implement where there would
20 actually be reduced revenue from the status quo.

21 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Okay.

22 MR. ENGLER: But I think also in the
23 testimony, I note that we agree that it's fair
24 to make a change to the abatement in light of
25 the changing market conditions. And that we

1 believe that the phased-out approach is a fair
2 way to do that.

3 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Okay. We are
4 looking at 2039. Probably get away with that.
5 All right. Okay. Going to limit my questions
6 because we have a lot of individuals here to
7 testify today.

8 Chair recognizes Councilwoman Gym.
9 Councilwoman.

10 COUNCILWOMAN GYM: Thank you very much,
11 Council President.

12 So Mr. Engler, I wanted to ask a little
13 bit about the tax abatement as a program
14 overall. Are you aware of any other city in the
15 country that does a tax abatement similar to
16 ours? In which case, it is ten years of
17 property taxes, granted not land value, blanket
18 across the city with no income restrictions or
19 caps or anything like that and also,
20 interestingly enough, not necessarily frozen?
21 The tax abatement actually grows over time.

22 So, are you aware of any other program
23 in the country that does something along those
24 lines?

25 MR. ENGLER: I'm not. I am far from a

1 subject expert on it. But Anne Fadullon, our
2 Director of Planning and Development is here.
3 She can provide any expertise.

4 COUNCILWOMAN GYM: It's a pretty
5 yes-or-no question. I don't want to bring up
6 Anne for a long --

7 MS. FADULLON: My favorite. So, the
8 short answer to your question is no. But there
9 are -- I don't have it at the tip of my tongue
10 and the top of my head. But a few years ago, we
11 did kind of look at this and pulled a bunch of
12 cities. Are various types of tax abatements.
13 In fact, you know, New York City has some of the
14 most generous tax abatements, but they are
15 usually tied to something else.

16 The only place that we found that did
17 not have any kind of abatement was Boston. And
18 when I said why is that, they basically said
19 because it was so difficult to build anything
20 there and supply was so limited, that they
21 didn't need an abatement.

22 COUNCILWOMAN GYM: Interesting. And has
23 the ten-year property tax abatement changed at
24 all in the last 18 years plus of its existence?

25 MS. FADULLON: So, I don't believe it's

1 changed in the last 18 years since this version
2 was passed, right? Initially, it was a three
3 year. And it was only for rehab of the upper
4 floors of commercial properties. And then I
5 think it went to some kind of a five year.

6 And ultimately, this passed where it was
7 a ten year full abatement on any type of
8 improvement.

9 COUNCILWOMAN GYM: So currently, there
10 has not been any substantive changes to this tax
11 subsidy program for almost two decades, in other
12 words?

13 MS. FADULLON: Correct. Since this
14 version passed, there has not been any changes
15 to it.

16 COUNCILWOMAN GYM: And is that standard?
17 I mean, tax subsidies --

18 MS. FADULLON: I honestly don't know.

19 COUNCILWOMAN GYM: -- can evolve and
20 change.

21 MS. FADULLON: I can't -- I don't know.

22 COUNCILWOMAN GYM: So, one of the other
23 questions I had is that if -- the Controller's
24 report says about 6 percent of Philadelphia's
25 neighborhoods receives almost 60 percent of the

1 benefits of the tax abasement.

2 Do you feel like this is the type of tax
3 policy that is reflective of the City's efforts
4 to move towards equity in terms of our use of
5 development dollars, incentives, et cetera?

6 MS. FADULLON: So, I think in one hand
7 it's equitable, because anybody can get it,
8 right? So, even our affordable housing
9 developments get it. You know, when you do a
10 tax credit deal, you actually by law have to
11 have a for-profit entity.

12 Even, for example, when the Housing
13 Authority does a project, they have to do it as
14 a for-profit entity. And they get a tax
15 abatement.

16 So in that respect, I think it's
17 equitable. But I think kind of what's built in
18 is, obviously, the higher the value of the
19 property, the more that gets abated. So, there
20 is sort of this lean towards kind of properties
21 with higher value getting a bigger benefit.

22 COUNCILWOMAN GYM: Yeah. I think that
23 map says a lot about how equitable it is. I
24 know especially for yourself, Ms. Fadullon, that
25 you've been dedicated to seeing equity.

1 MS. FADULLON: Yeah.

2 COUNCILWOMAN GYM: I think what we are
3 looking for is equitable development, and the
4 map doesn't show that. So, whether it's
5 intended to or not, the actual outcome, would
6 you say, is equitable?

7 MS. FADULLON: You know, I think it's
8 complicated, right, which is why we are having
9 the conversation today. So I think, you know,
10 development is part of what's added to us having
11 a stronger tax base; and then using that tax
12 base to support more equitable programs is a
13 very advantageous thing.

14 However, you know, like I said,
15 properties that have a higher value tend to get
16 a bigger benefit from this type of incentive.

17 COUNCILWOMAN GYM: So, Mr. Dubow, so one
18 clarification about the tax abatement that I
19 found really interesting is that say if someone
20 were to get the tax abatement in year one and
21 say the value of their house is \$300,000, is it
22 true that the tax abatement would actually grow?

23 So for example, if property values grow
24 over the next ten years, they're entitled to a
25 ten-year property tax abatement. They not

1 only -- they aren't just frozen in at the
2 300,000. The tax abatement actually grows and
3 expands.

4 Is that accurate?

5 I mean, they are taxed on the land
6 value, I understand. But say if the property
7 value were to grow by 30 percent over ten years,
8 it would then be valued at 420,000 by year ten.
9 They are not responsible for taxes on the
10 120,000? They would get a property tax
11 abatement for the full 420,000; is that correct?

12 MR. DUBOW: They only pay on the land.
13 That's right.

14 COUNCILWOMAN GYM: They only pay on the
15 land.

16 MR. DUBOW: Yeah.

17 COUNCILWOMAN GYM: So, the tax abatement
18 is something that grows expansively. It would
19 have no limit or cap if the value or property;
20 whereas, other counties might say, hey, you got
21 a \$300,000 tax break. That's pretty good for
22 the next ten years.

23 MR. DUBOW: I don't know how other
24 counties do it, but that's correct. That's got
25 to be how it works here correctly.

1 COUNCILWOMAN GYM: We can agree, though,
2 that no other municipality gives such a generous
3 program as does ours? So whether or not you --

4 MS. FADULLON: I think the honest answer
5 to that is we just don't know because we don't
6 know what every single other municipality is
7 doing. But I think your assessment of if you
8 buy a house at 330 -- at \$300,000 and let's say
9 the value of the land was 50, you get the 250
10 abated. And if the value of that house goes up
11 to 300, that yes, your -- technically, your
12 abatement kind of grows because of the value.
13 You don't get then retaxed on that increased
14 increment.

15 COUNCILWOMAN GYM: Thank you.

16 So, Mr. Monson, could you talk a little
17 bit about what the School District's facilities
18 needs are right now?

19 What is the actual -- couple years ago,
20 the School District issued a report about urgent
21 facilities needs within the School District. It
22 was something in the billions of dollars i think
23 it was.

24 MR. MONSON: It's about four and a half
25 billion dollars was that facility's condition

1 index. We are actually in the process of
2 updating it for both work we have done and,
3 obviously, have conditions have deteriorated.
4 But the number we generally use is four and a
5 half billion dollars.

6 COUNCILWOMAN GYM: And the ten-year
7 property tax abatement impacts the School
8 District how? What does -- how is the School
9 District impacted by the property tax abatement?

10 MR. MONSON: It reduces our real estate
11 tax revenues by -- for 2018, the last full year
12 of data, \$61 million a year.

13 COUNCILWOMAN GYM: \$61 million a year?

14 MR. MONSON: Yes.

15 COUNCILWOMAN GYM: Okay. So,
16 \$61 million is what the District might have lost
17 as a result of this?

18 MR. MONSON: In a raw number, yes. Not
19 accounting for the "but/for" argument of what
20 economic activity would or would not have
21 happened.

22 COUNCILWOMAN GYM: And the District has
23 been doing significant amount of work in the
24 area facilities. You recently announced a
25 infrastructure investment of how much borrowing?

1 MR. MONSON: We completed a borrowing of
2 \$500 million. Actually, closed on it about
3 three weeks ago.

4 COUNCILWOMAN GYM: And if we were to
5 delay implementation of this tax abatement,
6 would that put the District in a better or worse
7 position financially?

8 MR. MONSON: If --

9 COUNCILWOMAN GYM: If we were to -- the
10 proposal on the table is that the tax abatement
11 would change as of July 1. If we were to delay
12 that, say, a year or so, would that put the
13 District in a better or worse position?

14 MR. MONSON: It delays a year from when
15 we would recoup some of those revenues. So,
16 reduces our revenues.

17 COUNCILWOMAN GYM: And I assume that you
18 have use for that revenue?

19 MR. MONSON: Yes.

20 COUNCILWOMAN GYM: You can put it to use
21 right away?

22 MR. MONSON: Yes.

23 COUNCILWOMAN GYM: Are there instances
24 of school facilities that you can probably come
25 up with a list of?

1 MR. MONSON: I am sure everyone here is
2 familiar with a list of facilities that need
3 work.

4 COUNCILWOMAN GYM: Yes. Sometimes we
5 read about it in papers as you know.

6 MR. MONSON: Sometimes.

7 COUNCILWOMAN GYM: Yes, unfortunately.

8 I just wanted to clarify that. And the
9 District's amount of debt service on that -- on
10 the borrowing that you are doing for
11 infrastructure is about how much?

12 MR. MONSON: I don't have the debt
13 service for just that piece. Our total debt
14 service for this year is just shy of
15 \$300 million a year. The borrowing -- we had
16 always anticipated doing a borrowing about now.
17 And with our better credit rating and market
18 conditions, we originally anticipated doing
19 about 275/300. Those conditions would have
20 allowed us to borrow about 400 million with the
21 same debt expectations.

22 Obviously, because of concerns about the
23 facilities and market opportunities, we took
24 advantage doing the \$500 million borrowing.
25 Adding about -- we are estimating the final

1 numbers in about 8 to 10 million dollars a year
2 of additional debt service.

3 COUNCILWOMAN GYM: Okay. Thank you very
4 much. Thank you.

5 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Thank you,
6 Councilwoman.

7 Just want the members, we have a lot of
8 questions. Be cognizant of the fact we have a
9 lot of witnesses. And we want to make sure we
10 get everybody in today. I actually ordered
11 dinner, all right?

12 Just playing, just playing. Just
13 playing. Just playing.

14 Chair recognizes Councilman Squilla.

15 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Thank you,
16 Mr. President.

17 As far as when doing -- Rob, I guess.
18 When you are doing a -- applying for abatement
19 when you have a mixed-use building of commercial
20 and residential, now that we are doing this,
21 will that be done by OPA?

22 MR. DUBOW: Yes.

23 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: And they would then
24 have to differentiate between, say, a
25 residential apartment building on top of a

1 commercial use?

2 MR. DUBOW: Right. So, the residential
3 portion would be covered by this legislation.
4 And the commercial would be covered by the
5 preexisting legislation.

6 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: So, they would
7 receive two assessments?

8 MR. DUBOW: I think so. Either -- yes.
9 They would have to receive two. That's right.

10 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Okay.

11 MR. DUBOW: Didn't actually talk through
12 those logistics, but that makes sense.

13 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: All right. I
14 didn't know how that would work. So, I was just
15 curious to see how that would play out.

16 It would be OPA who would do that?

17 MR. DUBOW: OPA, yes, takes the
18 applications and makes the determinations.

19 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Of the assessed
20 values for both the commercial use and the
21 residential use?

22 MR. DUBOW: Yes. And whether someone
23 qualifies for the abatement and which abatement
24 they would qualify for.

25 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Right. I think

1 right now if they do it, it's commercial -- you
2 get a commercial abatement for a building like
3 that. So, that would change in the new --

4 MR. DUBOW: So the residential
5 abatement, that would be different from the
6 commercial abatement. So, the differentiation
7 would be really important.

8 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Okay. Thank you.
9 Thank you very much.

10 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Thank you,
11 Councilman.

12 Chair recognizes Councilman Green.

13 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Thank you, Council
14 President.

15 Good afternoon. Just have a few
16 questions. And Councilwoman Gym started some of
17 these questions. And I am curious on a couple
18 matters.

19 Mr. Monson, the School District has a
20 capital deficit of -- what was the amount again?
21 I'm sorry.

22 MR. MONSON: Four and a half billion
23 dollars.

24 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Four and a half
25 billion dollars on the capital side. Now

1 currently they have -- what's your current fund
2 balance?

3 MR. MONSON: We projected to end this
4 past June 30 with about \$214 million fund
5 balance.

6 COUNCILMAN GREEN: And what is your
7 projected fund balance for the next couple years
8 going out?

9 MR. MONSON: I believe we are projected
10 to end the current year at about 154 million.
11 Dropping to roughly \$50 million in '22 and being
12 negative by '23.

13 COUNCILMAN GREEN: By FY23 having a
14 neg --

15 MR. MONSON: I'm sorry, by FY22. '20
16 and '21 are positive; '22 would be negative.

17 COUNCILMAN GREEN: FY22, having a
18 negative fund balance?

19 MR. MONSON: Yes.

20 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Okay. And if the tax
21 abatement were to go way immediately, how much
22 money would the School District receive next
23 year?

24 MR. MONSON: I actually have not done a
25 year-by-year analysis.

1 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Give a range.

2 MR. MONSON: Sorry. Just give me one
3 second.

4 So, '21 we wouldn't receive anything.

5 COUNCILMAN GREEN: FY --

6 MR. MONSON: In the first year, we
7 wouldn't receive anything.

8 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Let me make sure I
9 understand that. If the ten-year tax abatement
10 were to go away immediately, you would receive
11 no dollars in the upcoming fiscal year?

12 MR. MONSON: Correct. Because all the
13 projects already out there, the issue is
14 projects that could no longer qualify for the
15 abatement as it's currently constructed.

16 COUNCILMAN GREEN: So, you would get no
17 new money in FY21. What would happen in FY22?

18 MR. MONSON: Estimate about one and a
19 half million dollars.

20 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Okay. And then, you
21 have significant financial problems going
22 forward, correct?

23 MR. MONSON: Correct.

24 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Okay. Mr. Dubow,
25 last year in the budget process, how much money

1 did the City Council and the Mayor put in for
2 the School District?

3 MR. DUBOW: One second. Let me just get
4 that. It's about -- I think it's 220, but I
5 might have the year wrong.

6 COUNCILMAN GREEN: 220 million?

7 MR. DUBOW: Think so, yeah.

8 COUNCILMAN GREEN: And then over the
9 past couple years, how much money has City
10 Council and the Administration put into the
11 School District?

12 MR. DUBOW: Over the current Five Year
13 Plan, it's \$1.2 billion. Over the '20 to '24
14 plan.

15 COUNCILMAN GREEN: And was that done
16 with property tax increases?

17 MR. DUBOW: It was not, no.

18 COUNCILMAN GREEN: So then, what was the
19 source of that additional money? My
20 understanding is the City's budget now is about
21 \$5 million?

22 MR. DUBOW: There are a few things.
23 One, we slowed down the pace of wage taxes --
24 wage tax reductions. We increased the transfer
25 tax. And we shifted money from our General

1 Fund. It's a combination of things.

2 COUNCILMAN GREEN: But we've also, based
3 on information I have seen from Pike and other
4 financial entities, we have also had a increase
5 of revenue coming to the City, correct?

6 MR. DUBOW: That's correct.

7 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Increase in wage tax?

8 MR. DUBOW: Increase in wage tax, yes.

9 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Sales tax?

10 MR. DUBOW: Yes.

11 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Transfer tax I think
12 is, like, 185 percent higher now than ten years
13 ago.

14 MR. DUBOW: That's right.

15 COUNCILMAN GREEN: And what was the
16 basis of those dollars, of that increase?

17 MR. DUBOW: Why did it increase?
18 Because the economy has been expanding. We have
19 had a really strong economy and one of the
20 longest expansions in the country's history.

21 COUNCILMAN GREEN: And when you say the
22 economy is expanding, in what areas has it been
23 expanding? In reference to --

24 MR. DUBOW: So, real estate values has
25 grown. That has helped both the School

1 District's revenue and the revenue that City
2 receives. Employment has grown, so that has
3 helped us with wage tax. And that then, in
4 turn, will help with things like sales tax
5 because people have more money.

6 COUNCILMAN GREEN: And so, has there
7 been additional development over that period of
8 time?

9 MR. DUBOW: Yes. There has been
10 additional development.

11 COUNCILMAN GREEN: And what's been the
12 source of that development from your
13 perspective? I mean, you have been Budget
14 Director for Mayor Street.

15 MR. DUBOW: For the source development,
16 I think I am going to defer to our Director of
17 Planning.

18 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Okay.

19 MS. FADULLON: So you know,
20 predominantly as we have seen a lot of the
21 development that has eds and meds. They
22 continue to build. And then also, we have seen
23 a lot of growth in the apartment sector.

24 COUNCILMAN GREEN: In the, I'm sorry?

25 MS. FADULLON: In the apartment sector.

1 COUNCILMAN GREEN: So, new construction?

2 MS. FADULLON: Predominantly, new
3 construction. You know, I think we touted that
4 probably ten years ago, it would have been hard
5 to find a crane in the sky. And now we see them
6 proliferate. You know, we still aren't growing
7 as strongly as some other places. But I think
8 for Philadelphia, we -- as Rob Dubow said, we
9 have been in a period of sustained growth.

10 COUNCILMAN GREEN: And Ms. Fadullon, I
11 believe prior to you coming to the public
12 sector, you worked in the private sector?

13 MS. FADULLON: Yes, I did.

14 COUNCILMAN GREEN: And in that role, you
15 were responsible doing development projects?

16 MS. FADULLON: Yes.

17 COUNCILMAN GREEN: And from your
18 experience in some of the development projects
19 you've involved in, were some of those projects
20 able to get done because of the tax abatement?

21 MS. FADULLON: Yes.

22 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Okay. So clearly
23 whenever you have some type initiative that will
24 start 20 years ago, we definitely need to make
25 changes. Would you say that's a correct

1 assumption?

2 MS. FADULLON: I do think that the
3 market has changed since this was first
4 introduced. And it always makes sense to look
5 at this type of policy on a periodic basis.
6 Which, again, is why I think you heard
7 Administration's testimony that we are very
8 supportive of the evaluation piece in this
9 legislation.

10 And that it's important to look at the
11 impact of this type of policy every -- you know,
12 every few years. In this case, every three
13 years. That that makes a lot of sense to figure
14 out what's working, how it's working, what's not
15 working. I think that's -- I think we believe
16 that that's just good practice.

17 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Okay. So, I will
18 close by saying this. I mean, from what I'm
19 hearing from you and also from the issue of
20 revenue of School District, we need to make sure
21 we maximize as much revenue as possible for the
22 District. But at the same time, we need to do
23 it in a way that's not going to impact the
24 City's economy.

25 MS. FADULLON: Yes.

1 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Okay. So, I mean,
2 clearly having this type of conversation is
3 something that's important. We definitely need
4 to make some revisions any time we do a policy
5 that's over two decades old. There needs to be
6 some changes, but we need to do it in a way that
7 benefits especially our School District that has
8 major financial challenges.

9 And hopefully, today's conversation will
10 be able to get to some type of decision that
11 does the best that we can going forward with the
12 respect that we can continue to look at this
13 policy in reference to how we can increase the
14 revenue for the School District, but also making
15 sure we have strong economy in our City.

16 Thank you, Council President.

17 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Thank you.
18 Thanks, Councilman.

19 Chair recognizes Councilman Johnson.

20 COUNCILMAN JOHNSON: Thank you, Council
21 President.

22 Mr. Dubow, I just had a couple questions
23 regarding the Administration's opposition to the
24 increase in the Homestead Exemption. So, I just
25 want a clarification. My only interest is in

1 addressing individuals who are losing their
2 homes to mortgage foreclosure, addressing
3 individuals who are experiencing issues around
4 gentrification. As we see neighborhoods thrive
5 as a benefit of the tax abatement, we also have
6 some individuals who want to stay within their
7 homes. And I'm always an advocate in trying to
8 find all the tax relief measures that we can
9 possible to helping people stay inside their
10 homes, most importantly, making sure they can
11 stay homeowners.

12 And so for FY21, what's the projected
13 number of revenue that we are looking at to
14 receive as relates to property tax assessments?

15 MR. DUBOW: For FY21, we are projecting
16 about a 3 percent increase in --

17 COUNCILMAN JOHNSON: Give me a dollar
18 amount.

19 MR. DUBOW: Have to look in the budget.
20 Take me a second to get that if I have it here.

21 COUNCILMAN JOHNSON: I'm going to help
22 you, and then you can just clarify if I'm off.

23 Projected number of revenue that we are
24 looking to receive from property tax assessments
25 is in the amount of a hundred million. That's

1 when the Homestead Exemption would go into
2 effect, projected.

3 MR. DUBOW: Yeah. So, the reason I
4 talked about the change in the base is the
5 dollar numbers influenced by when appeals are
6 heard. And so, part of the reason for that
7 increase is we're assuming that some of the
8 appeals that were for the tax year '20 taxes are
9 actually heard in '21. And so, there are some
10 increases off of that.

11 The dollar increase isn't just a
12 one-year increase. It has to do with kind of
13 writing up appeals from prior years, too.

14 COUNCILMAN JOHNSON: And what's the
15 current amount of money in our surplus right now
16 in our fund balance?

17 MR. DUBOW: We are projecting that we
18 will end this year with a \$300 million fund
19 balance, which is roughly 6 percent of budget
20 which is at the low end of the target range we
21 have where our fund balance should be. Much,
22 much lower than where the Government Finance
23 Office Association says we should be.

24 COUNCILMAN JOHNSON: Okay. And during
25 your last two budget cycles ago, there was a

1 construction tax that was on the table. And how
2 much revenue as relates to -- the construction
3 tax didn't pass, but the Administration came up
4 with additional funding.

5 How much money did we come up with over
6 a certain period of time over the several years?
7 How much did we come up with of non-new money to
8 cover the Affordable Housing Trust Fund?

9 MR. DUBOW: So, what we did for the
10 Affordable Housing Trust Fund is say that
11 expiring abatements, the revenue from the
12 expiring abatements would go to affordable --
13 City-side of that revenue would go to affordable
14 housing. And it was \$83 million, I think, over
15 five years.

16 COUNCILMAN JOHNSON: 83 million over
17 five years?

18 MR. DUBOW: Yes.

19 COUNCILMAN JOHNSON: Okay. And in June
20 you talked about us -- you talked about putting
21 out a search for a new director of OPA.

22 MR. DUBOW: That's correct.

23 COUNCILMAN JOHNSON: What's the status?
24 Because that's been quite some time since we've
25 been looking for a new director for Office of

1 Property Assessment.

2 MR. DUBOW: Yeah. So, we went through a
3 search and didn't find someone. So, now we have
4 hired a recruiting firm to help us with the
5 search. And they are on board looking for
6 someone.

7 COUNCILMAN JOHNSON: Okay. All right.
8 I just wanted to state those questions for the
9 record. Again, we definitely want to be
10 supportive of the School District. And so, the
11 reason why I use the analogy of how we were very
12 creative when we didn't use the construction
13 tax, we found a way to come up with additional
14 funding for the Housing Trust Fund.

15 I think even moving forward with the
16 Homestead Exemption, to give some level of
17 relief to predominantly low income families who
18 are living in very changing gentrified
19 neighborhoods, the opportunity to take advantage
20 of an increase of the Homestead Exemption. I
21 think we can be just as creative. I think the
22 members of this body, who have always stepped up
23 to the plate to fight on behalf of those who
24 need support, will find ways to work with the
25 Administration to find funding to help people

1 stay inside their homes. And so, I just want to
2 state that for the record.

3 Thank you, Mr. Dubow.

4 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Thank you,
5 Councilman.

6 Chair recognizes Councilwoman
7 Quinones-Sanchez.

8 COUNCILWOMAN QUINONES-SANCHEZ: Thank
9 you. Good afternoon, gentlemen.

10 Every year we get to do a budget and we
11 create a new document and a new Five Year Plan.
12 And every year that target moves and moves
13 through different appropriations. We move money
14 around and we set up a document that prioritizes
15 the values and the interest of all the citizens
16 of the City of Philadelphia. So, I'm not as
17 concerned with filling the gaps of our Five Year
18 Plan. Because in the last twelve years, I have
19 seen that target move every single year.

20 But I do want to get to the point of the
21 reason we are having this debate around tax
22 abatement, when you look at the \$7,000 appeals,
23 is our assessment process. And our dependency
24 on the value of all land; and then, ultimately,
25 who pays for that value?

1 And the problem is not the abatement;
2 although, it could be tweaked. I mean, we all
3 have our ideas about it. The problem is our
4 insisting in spreading the value of the
5 abatement to long term residents, which has
6 created the "them" versus "us"; the "new" versus
7 the "long term residents."

8 The leadership of OPA is a huge part of
9 it. But we can do this minor tweaking today,
10 and we are going to still have 7,000 pissed off
11 people and a bunch of other people because the
12 assessment process is still broken. And our
13 dependency on artificially valuing our land has
14 created this policy intersection in which we are
15 now. How do we continue to incentivize and
16 subsidize the building that we have in the City
17 and minimize its impact on long term residents
18 who have not had value appreciation based on
19 OPA, not real one.

20 (Applause)

21 Whose houses are not worth \$250,000
22 because we are using trending models and
23 spreading the abatement value. And so, a
24 document, a financial document on the income
25 side is as much of a reflection of the values

1 that we have as a government as the expense or
2 the investment side.

3 And so, the fact is that this abatement
4 discussion is -- the problem is our assessment
5 and our unwillingness to say that next year we
6 are not going to have double digit assessment
7 increases on people whose houses don't have
8 value.

9 This City policy, our OPA policy is, we
10 want to capture all that development value
11 that's unrealized. It's not realized until they
12 pay taxes on it. But this unwillingness or this
13 deliberate attempt to put all of that value on
14 long term residents has created this process.

15 What are we going to tell the residents
16 in March when they get their new bills?

17 MR. DUBOW: So just to be clear, the
18 growth in Tax Year 20 on residents was about 3
19 and a half percent. It wasn't double digit
20 growth. It was only about 3 and a half percent.
21 And if growth is in that range again, I think we
22 can say to residents, you know, your value has
23 gone up nominally. And that is what your
24 assessment reflects.

25 COUNCILWOMAN QUINONES-SANCHEZ: But

1 that's not what that reflects. When you look at
2 the last reassessment had a 10 percent increase,
3 right?

4 MR. DUBOW: That's not correct. The
5 last reassessment had the 3 and a half percent
6 increase.

7 COUNCILWOMAN QUINONES-SANCHEZ: Three
8 and a half percent all over when you spread it
9 out. The problem is how we spread it out.

10 MR. DUBOW: For residents, that's right.

11 COUNCILWOMAN QUINONES-SANCHEZ: For
12 residents.

13 MR. DUBOW: City wide for residents, it
14 was about 3 and a half percent.

15 COUNCILWOMAN QUINONES-SANCHEZ: Right.
16 But it's how you spread it out.

17 MR. DUBOW: Right. So, some people
18 would be higher and some people would be lower.

19 COUNCILWOMAN QUINONES-SANCHEZ: On the
20 last three or four years, what has been the base
21 value increase we have realized in the City of
22 Philadelphia? And the majority of that burden,
23 where has it laid? Because we know we messed up
24 on the commercial side. That's why we are in
25 court and we lost.

1 MR. DUBOW: I'm not going to comment on
2 something that's in court, and you know I can't.

3 COUNCILWOMAN QUINONES-SANCHEZ: But
4 that's why we lost.

5 MR. DUBOW: I'm not commenting on that.

6 COUNCILWOMAN QUINONES-SANCHEZ: And we
7 are losing the public discussion around
8 residential when we can't demonstrate to people
9 that their value -- that they are not paying for
10 the value of the growth of the City in a
11 disproportionate way, right? And when you have
12 7,000 appeals, that tells you how people are
13 feeling.

14 MR. DUBOW: 7,000 appeals on 540,000
15 properties. So, that's appeals on about 1
16 percent of the property -- 1.2 percent of the
17 property.

18 COUNCILWOMAN QUINONES-SANCHEZ: When you
19 look at the value in some of the -- again, this
20 was partly our fault with how historically we
21 have assessed properties in the City, right? We
22 assess based on permits, right, which
23 essentially disincentives improvements and
24 preservation, right?

25 We have to change the -- we were sold on

1 AVI as a basis to get to more real value as a
2 way for people to realize real equity, right?
3 And we have not gotten to the point where there
4 is fairness in that system, right?

5 And so, because we have not been able to
6 guarantee people that the new -- the three new
7 houses on their block, they are not going to pay
8 for that spread, that's why we are here where we
9 are, right?

10 MR. DUBOW: So, I think we are here
11 where we are in part because values Citywide
12 have gone up. The market has been strong. And
13 that means that value has gone up.

14 COUNCILWOMAN QUINONES-SANCHEZ: But the
15 market is for the new development, not for the
16 long term residents. And we have not been able
17 to convince the long term residents of their
18 value other than increasing their taxes. Their
19 house still has one bathroom. It still has a
20 bad roof. It still needs all the improvements.

21 (Applause)

22 MR. DUBOW: Right. But it can sell for
23 more than it did before. But --

24 COUNCILWOMAN QUINONES-SANCHEZ: We
25 created that. That is a policy decision on

1 our --

2 MR. DUBOW: That's the reason we put in
3 place a variety of relief programs, right?
4 That's why we put --

5 COUNCILWOMAN QUINONES-SANCHEZ: But the
6 relief has nothing to do with equity.

7 MR. DUBOW: -- the Homestead in place,
8 why we put LOOP in place, why we have the
9 payment plans that are as low as zero payment.

10 COUNCILWOMAN QUINONES-SANCHEZ: That is
11 after the fact. That is after the fact. We
12 have a broken system. And then, we are going to
13 create all these relief programs that people
14 have to opt in because we know we have a broken
15 system. And all I'm saying is, that regardless
16 of what we do today, the fact that you are
17 sitting here debating on a minimal Homestead
18 support is problematic and goes counter.

19 Because on the one hand, we have value
20 to the abatement and its growth. On the other
21 hand, we want to provide no or minimal support
22 for residents. That is a debated --

23 MR. DUBOW: That's not fair. We
24 provided a lot of support for this.

25 COUNCILWOMAN QUINONES-SANCHEZ: Council

1 has working with the Administration --

2 MR. DUBOW: The Homestead already
3 provides --

4 COUNCILWOMAN QUINONES-SANCHEZ: This is
5 so minimal.

6 MR. DUBOW: -- \$130 million a year in
7 relief. That's not minimal.

8 COUNCILWOMAN QUINONES-SANCHEZ: It is
9 minimal because the utilization is not there.
10 It --

11 MR. DUBOW: 220,000 properties have
12 Homesteads. That's utilization.

13 COUNCILWOMAN QUINONES-SANCHEZ: And what
14 percentage of that is City?

15 MR. DUBOW: So --

16 COUNCILWOMAN QUINONES-SANCHEZ: We still
17 have thousands of people who are not utilizing
18 that.

19 MR. DUBOW: For residential homes,
20 that's about 70 percent.

21 COUNCILWOMAN QUINONES-SANCHEZ: Right.

22 MR. DUBOW: Then there are other people
23 who have things like the LOOP Program or have
24 Senior Citizen Freeze. When you add all those,
25 and you get -- you get a much higher percent.

1 COUNCILWOMAN QUINONES-SANCHEZ: Again,
2 the reason this debate conversation is so
3 frustrating is because this Council has always
4 wanted to incentivize development.

5 I have sat here and taken votes all over
6 the place. We are not against that. We are
7 trying to create tools to minimize the impact of
8 what that is doing to long term residents
9 because we have no plan. We have a broken
10 assessment process. And we are still going to
11 piss off all of the long term residents until
12 the political will is there to fix the OPA
13 system.

14 (Applause)

15 Thank you, Mr. President.

16 (Councilman Henon sitting in as Chair.)

17 COUNCILMAN HENON: Chair recognizes
18 Councilwoman Parker.

19 COUNCILWOMAN PARKER: Thank you,
20 Mr. Chair. And let me say good afternoon to
21 each of you.

22 I want to go back, Mr. Dubow, to where
23 you -- and I think you just requoted this number
24 for us in terms of Council President's question
25 relative to the Homestead Exemption.

1 How many households are there in the
2 City of Philadelphia? How many households or
3 homeowners?

4 MR. DUBOW: I think the homeowner number
5 is probably about 340,000.

6 COUNCILWOMAN PARKER: So, about 340,000.
7 And you said that 70 percent of those, that's
8 where the 220?

9 MR. DUBOW: Yeah.

10 COUNCILWOMAN PARKER: Okay. So
11 obviously, of all of the tools that we have here
12 in the City of Philadelphia, it is obvious that
13 the Homestead Exemption is the most utilized
14 tool to help bring much needed property tax
15 relief to residents in the City of Philadelphia.
16 But because of the Uniformity Clause, we can't
17 pick and choose based on income levels about who
18 is eligible to receive or not.

19 Is that accurate?

20 MR. DUBOW: That's accurate, yes.

21 COUNCILWOMAN PARKER: So with that being
22 said, I want us to -- and I know this should be
23 very familiar to you, Mr. Dubow, because this is
24 the strategy we used during my tenure in the
25 Pennsylvania General Assembly. When that

1 enabling authority that this City Council needed
2 in order to even enact the Homestead Exemption,
3 to enact the Long Term Owner Occupant Program to
4 codify the ability for you to offer payment
5 arrangements and plans to Philadelphia residents
6 along with our ability to collect additional
7 delinquent property taxes, we use visuals like
8 this.

9 So with this in mind, I want you to --
10 and I don't know if you can see it. I want you
11 to think about residents who are in that section
12 where it says Substantial Rehab. Substantial
13 Rehab. That is actually the visual we see in
14 the middle. And very much like we see current
15 residential tax abatements and abatements just
16 for new construction, you will see that the
17 cluster is in the specific area where
18 neighborhoods are growing.

19 I want you all to tell me, what do you
20 think we have done wrong with this program that
21 residents outside of this hustling, bustling and
22 growing Fifth and Third District and First, that
23 they are not taking advantage, even if it's not
24 new construction. Because you know these
25 neighborhoods are landlocked, right? Many of

1 them you can't just go and build new houses
2 because you don't have the land there.

3 But even when it comes to Substantial
4 Rehab where preservation is needed the most,
5 what reason or rationale do you give or
6 understanding about why the abatement is so
7 underutilized in those areas outside of those
8 that are growing?

9 MS. FADULLON: You know, so I think what
10 we see kind of what we talked about at the
11 beginning, that that abatement sort of favors
12 higher property values because you have to have
13 something that can be abated. You have to have
14 a value that can be abated in order to really
15 get the benefit of that.

16 So, I think what we are seeing in a lot
17 of these other districts is potentially that the
18 cost of going into those districts and doing
19 those renovations, even with something like the
20 Abatement Program, that you are still not going
21 to get the property value high enough up there
22 or the revenue stream high enough in order to
23 justify the cost of doing those improvements
24 even with the abatement.

25 COUNCILWOMAN PARKER: Let me go back and

1 ask you this question. As I, again, look at
2 this visual, it is defined as Substantial Rehab.

3 Can any of you tell me how is
4 substantial rehab defined in the tax abatement?

5 What do I have to do to be considered to
6 have made a substantial rehab to my property in
7 order to be eligible to receive the abatement?

8 MS. FADULLON: Yeah. Unfortunately, I'm
9 not sure that the definition -- that is probably
10 something that came through L&I and how they
11 would classify the building permit. I assume
12 that what that means is that you are doing some
13 kind of major system repair, something that
14 would require a building permit.

15 So, there is some kind of work that you
16 can do to your house that doesn't necessarily
17 trigger a permit. But off the top of my head, I
18 don't know exactly with the definition is.

19 COUNCILWOMAN PARKER: Okay. And the
20 reason why I ask is because when people think
21 about substantial rehab, and as I've understood
22 it, you should be putting on some kind of
23 addition to your property in order to be
24 eligible for the substantial rehab portion. And
25 the reason why we need to re-think that and

1 re-think the way the enabling legislation is
2 written that created the tax abatement, because
3 if we are -- let's commend this Council and the
4 Administration for the things that we have
5 gotten right and the tools for neighborhood
6 preservation that we have done.

7 But if our goal is truly to focus on
8 neighborhood preservation for long term, owner
9 occupants who are in those good-old fashioned
10 brick and stone houses that have good bones but
11 need new modernization on the inside, we have to
12 find a way to redefine what substantial rehab
13 means so that regular, everyday people who are
14 making substantial repairs to their properties
15 are eligible to see them get abated.

16 Let me give you an example.

17 You are trying to increase the value of
18 your home, improve your property and you decide
19 that you want to go and get new hardwood floors
20 put throughout your house. Guess what? That
21 becomes a substantial improvement.

22 If you want to modernize the house and
23 knock a wall down because you do like the modern
24 floor plan but you like your good old brick and
25 stone and not the aluminum siding that they are

1 using today, you should be able to have those
2 substantial rehabs abated.

3 Is this Administration in a position to
4 say that it is willing to work with this Council
5 along with the General Assembly to figure out
6 how we can broaden the definition of substantial
7 rehab?

8 (Applause)

9 MS. FADULLON: Sure. The response to
10 that is sure. I think all those things --
11 again, I think the trigger is whether you need a
12 building permit. So if you are putting in
13 flooring, you may not necessarily need a
14 building permit to just replace your flooring.
15 And again --

16 COUNCILWOMAN PARKER: So -- but listen.
17 What if you -- for example, when we talk about
18 people who are trying to do things on their own,
19 and let's be real about this. We talk about the
20 good brick and the good stone.

21 Do you have to get a building permit
22 when you are getting your bricks pointed?

23 MS. FADULLON: I don't -- I think it
24 depends on what kind of -- the nature of that
25 work is. Whether if that structural -- if it

1 has impact on structural, I believe you do have
2 to get it.

3 COUNCILWOMAN PARKER: And again, the
4 reason why I am being so very specific is
5 because if we are talking about fairness and
6 equity and trying to manage investments and
7 relief for Philadelphia residents, I would argue
8 that the people outside of the areas where we
9 see the most growth, they have been consistent
10 contributors to this City's tax base. And they
11 have not seen a return on their investment.

12 MS. FADULLON: Yeah. I think the
13 question to look at beyond just the definition
14 of substantial rehab --

15 COUNCILWOMAN PARKER: Yes.

16 MS. FADULLON: Remember, the abatement
17 is about your property value increase. So, it
18 would be -- so what -- if you put in new
19 hardwood floors, for example, and it was
20 determined that what that does is increase the
21 value of your home by \$5,000 or, let's say,
22 \$10,000 because you put in those floors, your
23 abatement would only be on that \$10,000
24 increment, right?

25 COUNCILWOMAN PARKER: But my --

1 MS. FADULLON: I think its to look at --

2 COUNCILWOMAN PARKER: But the issue is
3 right now, the 10 to 15,000 dollar investment
4 that you just made on the flooring, I would
5 argue that there are very few, if any, because I
6 haven't heard of any. And when you go and look
7 at these charts and these numbers -- you have to
8 excuse me, because my district has sort of may
9 be nine is substantial rehab, maybe two in new
10 construction. But I never heard of those kind
11 of significant improvements being included, you
12 know, as being abated.

13 Which is why I know we have to work in a
14 coordinated effort to have them included.

15 MS. FADULLON: What I am going to say,
16 you know, that increment, if you are just
17 getting abatement on that 10,000-dollar value
18 increase, that might not be enough to help
19 support that kind of renovation.

20 COUNCILWOMAN PARKER: Stop. Put a pin
21 in it. Put a pin in it. You just hit the nail
22 on the head. You want me to tell you why?

23 MS. FADULLON: Because we know --

24 COUNCILWOMAN PARKER: We just talked
25 about the Homestead Exemption being the most

1 valuable tool. Mr. Dubow just told us that of
2 all of the programs we offered, 220,000
3 Philadelphians are signed up for the Homestead
4 Exemption. But you want me to tell you why by
5 10 to 15 to 25,000 dollar improvement wouldn't
6 be included? Because I have to choose between
7 whether or not I want to receive the Homestead
8 Exemption and/or apply for my substantial 25,000
9 dollar investment.

10 So when you hear me talk about a
11 coordinated effort, we have got to go back and
12 change the laws. Because now I got to make a
13 choice whether or not I'm going to get this
14 \$45,000 Homestead Exemption, you know. And I
15 need it. It's extremely valued. But at the
16 same time, why am I not benefiting from the 20
17 to \$25,000 that I was able to invest in and
18 improve in my property?

19 Maybe what we need to do as a team is go
20 to the Pennsylvania General Assembly. And we
21 need to tell them that we need substantial
22 changes to this enabling legislation. We need
23 to redefine substantial rehab. We need to
24 remove the requirement that you have to pick or
25 choose whether or not you get the Homestead

1 Exemption or the abatement. And what I am
2 saying is, we have done some good things. But
3 we have to work together in order to get this
4 done. I'm not finger pointing. We got to work
5 together to get it done.

6 MS. FADULLON: Again, I think what I am
7 trying to say is, we just got to make sure that
8 whatever we come up with, is actually a benefit.
9 Right.

10 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Thank you.

11 Just one more time, I want to remind our
12 colleagues. We have eight additional panels, so
13 we really need to be cognizant of the time.

14 Next up, Councilwoman Reynolds Brown and
15 Councilman Jones and then Councilwoman Bass.
16 That will conclude the first round. On the
17 second round, we have to limit it to five
18 minutes so we can make sure we get to the
19 individuals who have come down to testify.

20 Thank you.

21 Councilwoman.

22 COUNCILWOMAN REYNOLDS BROWN: Thank you,
23 Mr. President. Good afternoon, Administration.

24 Two questions. Following up on the
25 percentage of those who have taken advantage of

1 the Homestead or, more specifically, those who
2 have not, if we are at the 70 percent range,
3 what does it take -- what will be required to
4 inform that 30 percent that this is an
5 opportunity so that we can be in a 90-plus
6 situation?

7 MR. DUBOW: Yeah. The 70 percent, it's
8 a little understated because there are people in
9 other programs like abatements or the LOOP
10 Program or the Senior Citizen Tax Freeze that
11 have other kind of opportunities. But there are
12 still thousands of people. And I think it
13 requires, you know, some significant outreach
14 which I know we have done over time. But that's
15 really the answer to that, is it just requires
16 outreach.

17 COUNCILWOMAN REYNOLDS BROWN: Define
18 significant outreach.

19 MR. DUBOW: We have tried, and even
20 going door to door, you know, to letting people
21 know. So, that's the kind of outreach I'm
22 talking about.

23 COUNCILWOMAN REYNOLDS BROWN: As someone
24 who started my career going door to door,
25 linking up with the senior citizen homes in

1 particular would be valuable. Because too often
2 when we visit senior citizen homes on Fridays,
3 the Homestead is still a foreign anomaly that
4 many of them could be taking advantage of. And
5 so, non-traditional approaches are going to be
6 required.

7 My second and final question is, since
8 the tax abatement based purely on data, which is
9 in front of us, the Maps, is centered primarily
10 in Center City neighborhoods -- and many would
11 argue the obvious, that increasing have become
12 gentrified -- has the Administration considered
13 tax strategies that might spur development in
14 other communities like the Seventh or the Ninth?

15 MR. DUBOW: Unfortunately, she's gone.
16 She probably -- Anne, probably better to answer
17 that question. But, yes. We have -- one of the
18 challenges with tax strategy and trying to have
19 it spur development in particular areas is the
20 Uniformity Clause. So, we can't tax differently
21 in different areas. So, it makes it really
22 complicated to try to spur development in a
23 particular area.

24 COUNCILWOMAN REYNOLDS BROWN: So, that
25 punctuates Councilwoman Parker's appeal.

1 MR. DUBOW: Yes.

2 COUNCILWOMAN REYNOLDS BROWN: Thank you
3 very much.

4 (Councilman Greenlee sitting in as
5 Chair.)

6 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Thank you
7 Councilwoman. Councilman Jones.

8 COUNCILMAN JONES: Thank you,
9 Mr. Chairman. Thank you. Good afternoon.

10 Couple of just clarifying facts because
11 we do have other panel members to testify. But
12 if I understand all of these numbers -- I am
13 going to start with the question.

14 Our taxable property base is a hundred
15 billion?

16 MR. DUBOW: Our tax -- I think it's
17 about -- hold on, give me second. I have that
18 here somewhere. It is 168 billion.

19 COUNCILMAN JONES: So, it's 168 billion.
20 If I recall, we were talking about 99 billion
21 maybe five years ago when we were visiting some
22 of our City call for crisis. So we have done --

23 MR. DUBOW: So that was -- the first
24 year after AVI, we were at 137 billion.

25 COUNCILMAN JONES: So, if we were to try

1 to look at the value, increased value of our
2 property into, say, is that a trajectory that
3 has leveled off or it's going to continue, what
4 would be your response?

5 MR. DUBOW: So in FY20, the increase was
6 about 3 and a half percent. It's much -- we do
7 trending. It was much slower than it had been
8 in the year before. So, there was a bit of a
9 leveling off in that year. And I think if you
10 look at -- if the, you know, 70 percent of
11 economists project that we are going to go into
12 a recession, if that happens, you will see a
13 real leveling off in --

14 COUNCILMAN JONES: I'm not talking -- I
15 been here long enough to know that when we have
16 surpluses, we have doom-and-gloom recession and
17 when --

18 MR. DUBOW: I'm not --

19 COUNCILMAN JONES: Wait a minute, whoa.
20 Hold on. And then when we have recession, we
21 have to cut back. So, there's never an
22 opportunity for, you know, a positive outlook.
23 So, I get that. Your job is to be --

24 MR. DUBOW: And really quoting
25 economists. It's not just me saying it, so.

1 COUNCILMAN JONES: I get that. But the
2 trend has always been we've been optimistic
3 about the amount of revenues that have come
4 over. I've been here long enough to hear that
5 pattern develop, too. So, I just want to state
6 that for the record. We are talking about
7 \$168 billion worth of taxable properties
8 increased from the time we have done AVI from
9 130 --

10 MR. DUBOW: Four-ish. Increase about
11 30 billion.

12 COUNCILMAN JONES: So if we were looking
13 at the stock markets or whatever other form of
14 investment, this ain't bad.

15 MR. DUBOW: Yeah. Stock markets done a
16 lot better than that, though.

17 COUNCILMAN JONES: This is not bad. We
18 are doing well. I know the doom-and-gloom
19 recession is coming. Winter is coming. I get
20 it. But right now --

21 MR. DUBOW: Winter is coming. Thank you
22 for that phrase.

23 COUNCILMAN JONES: Right now, summer is
24 \$300 million worth of surplus. I want to
25 establish that.

1 Second thing I want to do is say that,
2 how many residential properties are there in the
3 City of Philadelphia?

4 MR. DUBOW: I think the number is about
5 340, I think. Don't have that one with me.

6 COUNCILMAN JONES: Say it again.

7 MR. DUBOW: I think about 340, but I
8 might be off.

9 COUNCILMAN JONES: And how many of them
10 are receiving abatements of some kind?

11 MR. DUBOW: On the residential, it's
12 about 12,000 -- little more than 12,000 get
13 abatements.

14 COUNCILMAN JONES: And I have number
15 that says 15.

16 MR. DUBOW: 15 is all properties. But
17 for residential, it's about 12.

18 COUNCILMAN JONES: And that's about
19 \$133 million worth of abatement?

20 MR. DUBOW: For residential?

21 COUNCILMAN JONES: Yes.

22 MR. DUBOW: For residential, I think
23 it's about 80 million just for residential. For
24 all properties, I think it's more like 150/160.

25 COUNCILMAN JONES: Okay.

1 MR. DUBOW: The 130, I think, may be the
2 Homestead number.

3 COUNCILMAN JONES: Okay. So, if that is
4 indeed true, then we are trying to look at our
5 tax strategy for four basic food groups. One is
6 the taxpayer, of course, homeowners.

7 MR. DUBOW: Right.

8 COUNCILMAN JONES: The second group is
9 the School District, I would say.

10 MR. DUBOW: Right.

11 COUNCILMAN JONES: Developing community
12 and then our City operating dollars.

13 MR. DUBOW: Yes.

14 COUNCILMAN JONES: And so, any way that
15 we adjust this, there is some predictable up or
16 down ebb and flow.

17 MR. DUBOW: Right.

18 COUNCILMAN JONES: Question I have, if
19 we have increased our property values
20 consistently over the last five years, is it
21 safe to predict that we will continue to do so,
22 that some of these stakeholders including the
23 City's operating budget, may not be as adversely
24 impacted because of our growth?

25 We were asked a couple of years ago not

1 only to get AVI but also to increase the
2 millage. Had we done that, we would have -- we
3 would have probably seen triple, no, double the
4 surplus. So as we look at pessimism, we also
5 should measure that with optimism about where we
6 are and the values that people are finding in
7 our real estate. And be able to kind of find
8 that middle ground on what we should do with
9 abatements.

10 Because if we cut the abatements -- as I
11 got a chart here -- it says we will probably
12 over the next eight years as the City of
13 Philadelphia, get \$61 million; is that correct?
14 City portion.

15 MR. DUBOW: It looks like it would
16 probably be a little higher than that. But we
17 would receive additional revenue, yes.

18 COUNCILMAN JONES: And the School
19 District portion is about 74 million?

20 MR. DUBOW: Little higher, yeah.

21 COUNCILMAN JONES: Little higher.

22 MR. DUBOW: Yes. Because they get 55
23 percent of the property tax.

24 COUNCILMAN JONES: So as we look at AVI,
25 and I do agree with my colleagues that say we

1 need to fix that formula somehow to be a little
2 more realistic and, like, somebody that doesn't
3 have a Harvard degree and economics can figure
4 it out. But there is probably at least a
5 platform to stand on that our property values
6 are continuing to rise. And that is probably a
7 safer predictable revenue for two of the
8 stakeholders, School District and the City of
9 Philadelphia.

10 The only question I have is, this impact
11 on the development community. But we are
12 going to -- we are going to be fairly okay if we
13 don't have that recession that you're talking
14 about in the --

15 MR. DUBOW: I think that's a big if.
16 But, yes. If the economy continues to grow, we
17 will continue to see growth in our values. If
18 it doesn't, if as most economists predict we
19 start to see a recession, then that growth can
20 stop.

21 COUNCILMAN JONES: And if I understand
22 this process here about taxation, we can't
23 change our taxes in mid year. But we can always
24 adjust them every year to meet our reality.

25 MR. DUBOW: We can adjust them for the

1 following year. That's right.

2 COUNCILMAN JONES: So, I'm not afraid of
3 the change to come. I love your pessimistic
4 kind of review. I love how we get pleasantly
5 sometimes surprised with our revenue. But we
6 need to make it better if we want to keep long
7 term residents -- residents in the City of
8 Philadelphia because we are losing them.

9 MR. DUBOW: And I think kind of -- get
10 to one of the points you made, I think that's
11 why Administration favors looking at the
12 abatement and making change to it. So, I don't
13 think we disagree with you there.

14 COUNCILMAN JONES: No. I said I love
15 how you project some things. But I tend to be
16 more optimistic over the years about the future
17 of this City than sometimes you have to be.

18 Thank you.

19 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Thank you,
20 Councilman.

21 Chair recognizes Councilwoman Bass.

22 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Thank you,
23 Mr. President. I'm going to be brief because I
24 know we have a lot of folks who came down and
25 spent a lot of time here from the communities

1 who want to testify. And I think it's most
2 important to hear from them. You all are great.
3 We really want to hear from them.

4 So, I just had the --

5 MR. DUBOW: If you want to start now,
6 that's fine with us.

7 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Not yet. Not just
8 yet. But I did want to just really add some
9 clarity. I feel like sometimes we give mixed
10 messages unintentionally. And so, I just want
11 to go back to some of the testimony in which --
12 I think it's a little confusing.

13 And I just wanted to make sure that we
14 are absolutely clear that we are -- you know,
15 that the Administration is on board with what we
16 are trying to do here. And that is to make some
17 very small incremental changes to a program that
18 has had a huge impact here in the City of
19 Philadelphia and is desperately in need of some
20 significant change.

21 So, the question that I had was on,
22 Mr. Engler, it was on your testimony in which
23 you said that the abatement has helped achieve
24 the goal of strengthening a very weak market
25 here in the City of Philadelphia. Numerous

1 studies have shown the Abatement Program helped
2 achieve the goal, and then you go on otherwise.
3 And that statement to me suggests that the
4 Administration should wholeheartedly support the
5 proposal as presented. It should wholeheartedly
6 support the bill that we presented.

7 But then as I read a little bit further
8 on, you know, it states that -- studies have
9 concluded the elimination and reduction of the
10 existing abatement would lead to a reduction in
11 construction activity and loss of development
12 and employment and tax revenue and sort of like
13 the -- you know, I hate to put it this way, sort
14 of like the doom and gloom we always hear is
15 going to happen if we take away a the ten-year
16 tax abatement. And I just don't believe it to
17 be so.

18 And so, you know, again, I think that
19 this is a program that when it started, keeping
20 in mind that we have had abatements in
21 Pennsylvania since the 1970s. This is nothing,
22 you know, radically new. But what changed, you
23 know, in the early 2000s is the, you know, like
24 the lifting of caps and the, you know, just sort
25 of anything was able to be abated to some

1 degree.

2 And so, I just wanted to make sure that
3 we were all on the same page. That, you know,
4 periodic evaluation should happen between City
5 Council and the Administration. I think that
6 that's something that's very important. But I
7 think that how we start and the message that we
8 send is very, very important. And so again, I
9 think it jus sends a really, you know, unclear
10 message in terms of whether the abatement has
11 done it's job. And that we need to make some
12 significant changes or whether these changes are
13 going to be detrimental to the economy, which I
14 personally don't believe to be true. But it's
15 also in your testimony.

16 So if you can clarify that for me, I
17 would appreciate it.

18 MR. ENGLER: Sure. So, discussing the
19 abatement in, I guess, in that paragraph in that
20 testimony when we talk about the very weak
21 market, I am talking about the market that
22 existed when this ten-year abatement was
23 instituted.

24 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Yes.

25 MR. ENGLER: And then towards the end of

1 the same paragraph, we agree that because the
2 market has shifted since then in the intervening
3 eight or so years since this was adopted in its
4 current form, it makes sense to revisit it and
5 look at it. Also later in the testimony, we
6 also mentioned the phase-out approach as being
7 discussed today, makes sense as a way to change
8 that.

9 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Right.

10 MR. ENGLER: So, I don't know that it's
11 necessarily disconnected in other that this was
12 a program implemented several years ago to
13 address the market as it existed then. And it
14 make sense to make changes as the market
15 changes. But it also makes sense to evaluate
16 that change and to evaluate how this change has
17 impacted the market in three years or in four
18 years, and to do that prospectively going
19 toward.

20 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: I think that makes a
21 lot of sense. I think it makes sense to take a
22 look at this, you know, going forward on a
23 periodic base. Here we are almost 20 years, and
24 we are finally getting around to making some
25 changes that really should have happened a very

1 long time ago.

2 But I think that your statement, you
3 know, would have been fine, you know, if your
4 statement would have stood as it was. But
5 adding the fact that, you know, what the studies
6 have concluded, the elimination, you know, lead
7 to job loss and revenue loss and, you know, the
8 sky is falling, I think that that sort of makes
9 it seem as if the -- that there is not a clear
10 vision from the Administration in terms of where
11 you all are on this.

12 MR. ENGLER: Sure.

13 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: I think that
14 additional information you provided in the
15 testimony really does make it a little murky.

16 MR. ENGLER: Sure. I think at least we
17 felt it was necessary to do that. That we asked
18 Jones Lang LaSalle to do a study for us a year
19 and a half ago to really analyze several
20 different options for changing the abatement.
21 And what they found was that no matter which way
22 you changed it, there would be some negative
23 activity. It's not that -- you can't change a
24 policy, change a policy that has been successful
25 in changing the market, at least we think it

1 has, and not expect to have any impact at all.
2 And I think what they found in their study is
3 that there would be impact. I think we found it
4 necessary to make sure that in our testimony, we
5 note what that impact is.

6 That doesn't mean that you don't make a
7 change.

8 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Okay.

9 MR. ENGLER: I think we have to
10 understand and go into making any policy
11 changes, no matter what we do as a government,
12 no matter what we decide to fund, no matter what
13 policy we decide to implement, it's always going
14 to have impacts. And some of those impacts are
15 not going to be known to us when we make the
16 change. Which is why I think it's so important
17 that we do the periodic evaluations to really
18 get a sense of what we are doing, has it worked,
19 has it not worked, has it had unintended
20 consequences that we didn't know of when we
21 implemented it.

22 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Right.

23 MR. ENGLER: So, I think that's why we
24 felt it was necessary to include that in the
25 testimony because we have that from the study

1 that we conducted in the recent past. We should
2 all go into any changes that are going to be
3 implemented with eyes wide open about how it
4 will impact certain sectors of our economy.

5 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Okay. I would
6 agree. You know, I think to some degree it's
7 irresponsible not to make a change. Where we
8 see a policy that's had such a huge impact here
9 on the City of Philadelphia, for us to, you
10 know, go this long, like I said, almost 20 years
11 in and we are just getting to make changes now.
12 I think that this should have been done a long
13 time ago.

14 But thank you for your clarity. Thank
15 you.

16 Thank you, Mr. President.

17 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Thank you,
18 Councilwoman. I believe we have Councilman Domb
19 and then Councilman Oh and then we will start
20 the five minutes, Councilman.

21 COUNCILMAN DOMB: Thank you,
22 Mr. President. Thank you for your testimony
23 today. I have a few quick questions.

24 In our current billing of real estate, I
25 think you mentioned it was 168 billion that we

1 bill. And is it about 120 to 122 billion that's
2 actually billed? Because the others are eds and
3 meds that we don't bill real estate taxes for.

4 MR. DUBOW: That's right.

5 COUNCILMAN DOMB: That's pretty
6 accurate?

7 MR. DUBOW: Yeah.

8 COUNCILMAN DOMB: So, we don't bill
9 about 48 billion of real estate value.

10 MR. DUBOW: Right.

11 COUNCILMAN DOMB: Okay. And any idea
12 what that billable figure was four to six years
13 ago?

14 MR. DUBOW: That's the 99 billion that
15 we were talking about.

16 COUNCILMAN DOMB: Okay.

17 MR. DUBOW: The taxable number, yeah.

18 COUNCILMAN DOMB: And is it true, like
19 six, seven years, Real Estate Tax billings were
20 about 1.1 billion seven years ago?

21 MR. DUBOW: I would have to look at
22 that.

23 COUNCILMAN DOMB: That's what it looked
24 like in the records.

25 MR. DUBOW: I'm guess you're looking at

1 a document you have.

2 COUNCILMAN DOMB: Yeah. And today it's
3 1.7 billion?

4 MR. DUBOW: Again, I don't have it in
5 front of me.

6 COUNCILMAN DOMB: Okay. And then the
7 other question I have is that -- I want to just
8 clarify. You mentioned 340,000 properties are
9 residential?

10 MR. DUBOW: Right.

11 COUNCILMAN DOMB: And you have any idea
12 of that amount, how many are actually
13 owner-occupied?

14 MR. DUBOW: That's the owner-occupied
15 number. That is the owner-occupied number,
16 yeah.

17 COUNCILMAN DOMB: And how many total tax
18 bills are there?

19 MR. DUBOW: Total tax bills are about
20 580,000. But that includes, obviously,
21 nonresidential and commercial.

22 COUNCILMAN DOMB: Here is my question.
23 If I keep hearing that the City's 51 percent
24 owner-occupied housing, how could that 340,000
25 be accurate?

1 MR. DUBOW: Right. I would have to look
2 at that. That sounds -- I think it wouldn't
3 work.

4 COUNCILMAN DOMB: Okay. And then just
5 last question I just want to mention regarding
6 this bill that we are trying to discuss today.
7 I want to give credit to the Council President
8 for herding us together to get this bill put
9 through. And we have all different opinions.
10 And no, it's not perfect. And everyone feels
11 it's not perfect on either side of the equation.
12 I guess that's governing to a degree.

13 The good thing about it is it keeps in
14 place a very important factor. And that is, we
15 all agree that we need more jobs in the City and
16 good paying jobs. And this bill keeps that
17 piece in place, which is very important. And it
18 keeps in place the renovation of our existing
19 structures. So, old factories, old warehouses,
20 run down row homes that need to be renovated,
21 keeps it in place.

22 So I think for those things, I want to
23 thank you, Council President. And that's,
24 basically, my comment today.

25 Thank you.

1 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Thank you,
2 Councilman. And as you know, thank you for the
3 collective effort of this Council which is part
4 of being a legislature. You always have to
5 build consensus about whatever it is we do.

6 Chair recognizes Councilman Oh.

7 COUNCILMAN OH: Thank you very much.
8 Thank you very much Council President. I'm just
9 making a speech.

10 But the reason I'm doing it is because I
11 have a very different understanding of this
12 entire situation, so I just want to put it out
13 as best I can. And you can respond or not if
14 you think it's important or whatever.

15 But to me, this issue is about the
16 building industry and developers versus
17 residents, homeowners and renters. And it
18 doesn't have to be, but it's just ended up that
19 way. And I think people are confused over the
20 effects of what they have seen. And they think
21 it's the ten-year tax abatement. And it's
22 actually not. It's the assessments.

23 The ten-year tax abatement has been a
24 good thing. We had area of the City that had a
25 very little value to it. And after Mayor

1 Rendell did his thing, John Street cleared the
2 way and along came investment and improvements
3 that actually increased the value, truly
4 increased the value with real investments.

5 But that ten-year tax abatement which
6 meant that a house or two houses that were
7 exactly the same value, a hundred thousand
8 dollars in real value, when someone put a
9 million dollars into one of those houses, that
10 increased the value truly by a million dollars
11 but they only paid a hundred thousand dollars in
12 taxes. But at the end of ten years, the money
13 would then come to the City as it is coming. It
14 might not have been there, people argue it might
15 or not have been there without the ten-year tax
16 abatement.

17 But what people are reacting to is the
18 fact that their house has not increased in value
19 in any way. There has been no improvement to
20 their home. Their home is just getting older.
21 And the City comes along and assesses it at a
22 value beyond what they can pay. And they are
23 watching their neighbors, family and friends
24 being forced out of their homes with sheriff
25 sales for a value of a home they are never, ever

1 going to receive.

2 And so, even if we amend the abatement
3 and move it around, it will continue to help
4 development. It will help the building
5 industry. They will be able to do their things,
6 right? But it won't help the homeowners who are
7 being pushed out of their neighborhoods because
8 of incorrect, inaccurate overly high assessments
9 that they can't afford to pay the taxes on. And
10 so, the assessment has to be fixed.

11 And so, I think you can do both. I
12 mean, the abatement was a state incentive to
13 invest and develop poor communities, oftentimes
14 high in crime where there wasn't development or
15 investment. But the City made it the entire
16 City. That's why when you look at the map, the
17 investments are in Center City and other luxury
18 highrise development areas. And I know the City
19 wants to keep that incentive there, to keep
20 building because we are a high tax City with
21 high labor costs. And that offsets it.

22 And so, if you separate the two, we can
23 keep doing the building in Center City. But
24 really, we are kind of coming down towards the
25 end of the value of the ten-year tax abatement.

1 It really is meant for helping economically
2 challenge communities, and then maybe there are
3 some specialty projects.

4 But I would just like to say that I
5 don't think it helps people, whatever we do with
6 this ten-year tax abatement if we don't fix the
7 assessment problem.

8 Thank you.

9 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Thank you,
10 Councilman.

11 Chair recognizes Councilman Green.
12 Councilman, we are on our five minute.

13 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Thank you, Council
14 President. I was not going to go through
15 another round of questions. But after my
16 colleague Councilwoman Sanchez asked about the
17 OPA process, and I -- to be quite honest, I just
18 can't even believe that we are about to go
19 through another budget cycle more likely than
20 not without an OPA director with still a flawed
21 system.

22 I have asked about CAMA, which computer
23 system managed appraisal system, which we are
24 not going to even get to because we don't have
25 an OPA director. And so, the fact that you have

1 7,000 appeals on property assessments, that's
2 because people with resources have the ability
3 to make those appeals. When you say 3 percent
4 increase, the majority of that increase is
5 hitting people who are lower or moderate income
6 because they don't have the resources to get an
7 attorney or do the assessment themselves. So,
8 we are putting that additional burden on people
9 who are low to moderate income because we have a
10 failed system.

11 And so my question is, when are we going
12 to address OPA? I do not want to go through
13 this budget system once again without having OPA
14 director, the fact we can't get CAMA -- we've
15 been talking about CAMA for ten years at least
16 since you were budget director under Mayor
17 Street. The fact that we are a City that is a
18 major City in this country and we cannot fix our
19 assessment system is unbelievable.

20 I cannot believe that we are -- we
21 didn't know even we didn't find an OPA
22 director. The fact that we are about to go
23 through this process once again, go through the
24 budget process with revenue based on assessments
25 that we don't even know are actually correct.

1 They are impacting people with moderate income
2 to all peoples throughout the Philadelphia.
3 That is one of the issue that has been
4 exacerbated by the ten-year tax abatement is
5 that OPA system.

6 Please, tell me we are not going to go
7 through a budget process once again without
8 having some type of fix on OPA.

9 MR. DUBOW: So, CAMA is still going live
10 early next calendar year.

11 COUNCILMAN GREEN: It's going live early
12 next year?

13 MR. DUBOW: Yeah.

14 COUNCILMAN GREEN: How long has CAMA
15 been going live?

16 MR. DUBOW: Every year when you've asked
17 me when it's going live, I've been telling you
18 it's going live --

19 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Right.

20 MR. DUBOW: Wait, wait, wait. Can I
21 finish my sentence?

22 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Every year --

23 MR. DUBOW: It's been going live in
24 early '20.

25 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Let me finish.

1 MR. DUBOW: And it still is.

2 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Every year we have
3 been saying CAMA's been going live for how long?

4 MR. DUBOW: Every year since being in
5 this Administration, I have been telling you
6 it's going live in early '20 --

7 COUNCILMAN GREEN: And the previous
8 Administration?

9 MR. DUBOW: No. No. You didn't let me
10 finish my sentence. It's been going live in
11 early '20. And that's still when it's going
12 live. It's going live when we've been telling
13 you it's going live.

14 We told you every year it's early '20.
15 That's still the schedule.

16 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Okay. Let's get back
17 to OPA because my time is almost done.

18 MR. DUBOW: Yeah. OPA, there were a
19 number of recommendations from the audit that
20 Council did and from the audit that we had done.
21 And we are implementing those recommendations.

22 So, part of that is the search. Part of
23 it is getting outside vendor to help us make
24 sure that our data is accurate. Part of it is
25 hiring more staff for OPA. Part of it was

1 building out the modeling unit, which we have
2 done. Another part of it was putting in place a
3 sales validation unit to check the accuracy of
4 sales. So, those were all things that we have
5 done over the course of the last year to make
6 sure that the assessments are more accurate.

7 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Mr. Monson, I have a
8 question. How much money has the School
9 District lost from appeals from assessments.

10 MR. MONSON: How much lost have we lost
11 on appeals of assessments?

12 COUNCILMAN GREEN: How much you lost on
13 appeals of assessments. Let's go last year.
14 Give me a range. Don't give me a specific
15 number, give me a range.

16 MR. MONSON: I actually don't know.
17 Just to explain, when we budget, we assume a
18 certain amount is going to be appealed. A
19 certain percentage is appealed.

20 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Right.

21 MR. MONSON: I'd have to go back and
22 figure out. Actually, we have been -- the
23 appeal rates been a little better than what we
24 anticipated in terms of it's been lower than --

25 COUNCILMAN GREEN: The appeal success

1 rate is better than you anticipated?

2 MR. MONSON: The dollar amount, the
3 dollar value has been --

4 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Higher than you
5 thought?

6 MR. MONSON: No. The successful appeal
7 has been lower than we thought. We have been
8 conservative in our projections. We have been
9 getting a little -- I'm trying not to create
10 this into a tongue twister. I'm sorry.

11 Let's say we assume 10 percent is lost
12 in appeal. The net result is that 8 percent is
13 lost in appeal we have found the past few years.
14 Ballpark, those are the accurate figures.

15 We always assume there is some measure
16 of appeal and some loss. Like there is some
17 measure of uncollected. And all those go into
18 the factor of when we do our projections.

19 COUNCILMAN GREEN: So in your budget
20 process, you assume you are going to lose some
21 dollars on appeals?

22 MR. MONSON: Correct.

23 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Every year?

24 MR. MONSON: Yes.

25 COUNCILMAN GREEN: I would venture part

1 of the reason why you are doing that is because
2 we do not have a consistent system of evaluating
3 property in the City of Philadelphia. If
4 you write -- if we go to the City website, you
5 should be able to get a sense of how we assess
6 City properties. We do not have that.

7 We are in a situation where we have
8 people of all incomes, especially moderate to
9 low income are believing we are raising their
10 taxes every year not because City Council has
11 done that, because the assessments keep going up
12 and because we keep doing assessments on the
13 backs of people that can't afford it.

14 Thank you, Mr. President.

15 (Applause.)

16 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Thank you,
17 Councilman.

18 Any other questions of these witnesses?

19 There being none, guys you need to get
20 out of here as soon as you can. Thank you very
21 much for your testimony.

22 We would like to briefly go into the
23 Public Meeting just for a couple of minutes.

24 - - -

25 (Public Hearing adjourns.)

1 (Public Meeting commences.)

2 - - -

3 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Chair
4 recognizes Councilman O'Neill.

5 COUNCILMAN O'NEILL: Yes, Mr. President.
6 I would like to record my votes. I have to
7 leave the Chamber. And I know that requires us
8 to us go into a Public Meeting.

9 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Yes, thank
10 you. That vote shall be recorded. Thank you
11 very much, Councilman.

12 COUNCILMAN O'NEILL: As on Bills No.
13 190943 and 190944.

14 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Thank you,
15 Councilman. Thank you. We will now go back
16 into the Public Hearing.

17 COUNCILMAN O'NEILL: Voting aye on both.

18 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Aye on both
19 bills. Record will reflect that.

20 - - -

21 (Public Hearing Recommences.)

22 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: We will now
23 go back into our Public Hearing.

24 And next on my list -- we had a --
25 sorry, I just want to make -- we had a couple of

1 cancellations.

2 First of all, we are going to ask the
3 witnesses to keep their testimony to two minutes
4 if at all possible. We want to make sure we
5 have a lot of people listed, and some people
6 have signed up in addition to our list. So as
7 best possible, if you can keep our testimony to
8 two minutes.

9 We have David Feldman, Gary Jonas and
10 Jim Maransky.

11 (Approaches Witness Table.)

12 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Good
13 afternoon, gentleman.

14 ("Good evening.")

15 Please proceed.

16 MR. MARANSKY: Good afternoon. My name
17 is Jim Maransky. And I'm President of the
18 Building Industry Association of Philadelphia.
19 I'm joined by Treasurer Gary Jonas.

20 The BIA is a trade association of
21 residential and mixed use developers working
22 throughout Philadelphia along with the
23 professionals who provide the development
24 industry with products and services. Thank you,
25 Councilman Clarke and the rest of Council for

1 the opportunity to provide commentary on Bill
2 190944.

3 I would like to spend a couple minutes
4 walking through -- walking the community through
5 the abatement and why it is so critical to
6 residential development in our City. Gary will
7 then discuss some amendments that we proposed.

8 It's no secret that Philadelphia has
9 fundamentally transferred since the passage of
10 ten-year residential property tax abatement,
11 bringing much needed investment to the City,
12 increasing revenues, creating jobs and improving
13 infrastructure. The tax abatement served to
14 correct the market failure to supply housing
15 where demand already existed.

16 (Audience interruptions.)

17 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Excuse me.
18 Come on, folks. Go ahead. Please proceed.

19 You will get a chance to testify.

20 MR. MARANSKY: The benefit to the
21 program have not yet reached all the
22 neighborhoods because demand has not been strong
23 enough. And the rents and sales prices,
24 therefore, not high enough. Which is why you
25 see a large cluster of the abatements in Center

1 City. It's where the prices are high enough
2 that you can build new construction. And the
3 abatement is taken advantage of.

4 While construction has been impressive,
5 we lag our peer cities in construction of
6 housing units. Our unprecedented construction
7 boom is not because there are windfall profits
8 to be had, not because there is excess demand
9 but because we have finally reached a point
10 where just enough demand for real estate and
11 real estate financing conditions are just at the
12 right point making sense to do low interest
13 rates and City incentives that finely make sense
14 to build.

15 Philadelphia real estate development is
16 in a Goldilocks Zone. It's a demand that
17 evaporates a little bit or if the incentives
18 lever is pushed to increase cost even the
19 slightest, construction favorable to financeable
20 conditions will disappear. And the cranes we
21 all enjoy working will slowly fade from the
22 skyline along with the wage, sales and use,
23 sales and occupancy, business income, realty
24 transfer and real estate taxes that new
25 buildings generate.

1 New real estate development creates a
2 broader tax base. And all of those dollars
3 provide additional funding for public services
4 for schools, regardless of whether the -- where
5 the development occurs. In contrary to the
6 widespread misperception that the abatement is
7 just a temporary windfall to developers. The
8 numbers strongly confirms that represents a long
9 term source of growth to the City economically,
10 demographically and fiscally.

11 Of the 10,000 units built under the
12 abatement, two-thirds remain owned by the
13 initial occupant. Of those that are since sold,
14 the majority have sold for prices greater than
15 original purchase price despite no longer having
16 abatement. Over the course of ten years that
17 abatements were in effect, these dwellings still
18 generated nearly \$140 million in real estate
19 taxes and currently generate \$44.8 million per
20 year in real estate taxes.

21 There is a question asked earlier
22 whether or not the abatement has changed and --
23 since its inception. Maybe not by legislation.
24 But a few years ago the OPA changed how they
25 were assessing land value after the project was

1 complete, which then reduced the abatement by
2 about 25 percent. Now we are talking about
3 another 45 percent decrease with this change.

4 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Mr. Maransky,
5 if you can limit.

6 MR. MARANSKY: Yes, sir.

7 Two quick points to wrap up. You know,
8 over the last couple days, we have received --
9 the BIA has received a lot of questions on why
10 we have proposed a compromise to the bill
11 because BIA's position has always been to fight
12 any change to the abatement. And the reasons
13 it's been 14 Council people signed on to this
14 bill, so we understand there's a time for change
15 and there's a need for change. We ask that the
16 City Council listen to the BIA and hear us when
17 we say a change this drastic will have a major
18 effect on the market and could spin the real
19 estate into a recession.

20 And one other point on implementation.
21 Regardless of the timeline, I know there's back
22 and forth different proposal on timeline.
23 Regardless of the timeline, I would propose that
24 the deadline be based on building permit
25 application and not on the building permit

1 approval.

2 We saw that same deadline be set and the
3 same implementation deadline set when we did the
4 new plumbing code this year as well as the new
5 building code because it creates undue stress on
6 L&I to try to determine when that building
7 permit gets approved and when it comes out.
8 It's unfair to L&I. And it's also unfair to the
9 applicant that it be on the approval date of the
10 build permit that's. Why I propose it's on the
11 building permit application.

12 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Thank you.
13 And do want to acknowledge that you all, the BIA
14 has been working with people. You know, we had
15 other conversations around the construction tax.
16 You guys were integral part of that discussion.
17 So, I do want to acknowledge your willingness to
18 work with City Council and other stakeholders on
19 a number of different issues. I want to say I
20 appreciate that.

21 MR. MARANSKY: Thank you.

22 MR. JONAS: My name is Gary Jonas. I am
23 Treasurer of the BIA. I am going to be super
24 quick here in trying to stick with your
25 timeline. We have these proposed amendments we

1 are looking at.

2 Number one, we would love to see the
3 amendments stay in a hundred percent effect for
4 the first five years and decline for the next
5 five years. There is reasons for us as
6 developers why that is beneficial. But more
7 importantly, there is reasons for buyers and,
8 specifically, affordable homeowner buyers that
9 when they are qualified for their mortgages,
10 it's based on what the taxes are over the next
11 five years.

12 So what that means is, somebody buying
13 an affordable unit that has this tax abatement
14 that declines over five years now has an
15 additional significant burden from a
16 qualification standpoint. So, while you could
17 get to almost the same thing by putting that
18 first five years in a static state, we think
19 that's really important to potential homeowners
20 that are buying specifically affordable. So, we
21 wanted to mention that.

22 The second thing is, we would love to
23 push back the implementation date. And we are
24 suggesting July of 2021, which I know nobody is
25 really in favor of. But I wanted to give you a

1 quick -- one of our member examples that
2 explains why we are requesting that. It's this.

3 We have somebody that purchased a
4 property already that's a current member, so
5 working with their Council District and local
6 RCO to provide 20 percent of the units in the
7 building affordable. They're 12 to 18 months
8 from today to get in for building permit. Which
9 would mean that if this proposal were to go into
10 effect as proposed, that project would
11 not have -- would not be able to work the way it
12 was. We would have to go back and reduce the
13 amount of affordable housing that's in that
14 unit.

15 So by asking for the extension, what we
16 are really asking for is the projects that are
17 currently in the pipeline or stuff that people
18 have purchased already, that that stuff is able
19 to get through based on all the underwriting
20 that was done and all the good projects, that
21 they would be able to continue.

22 And then finally, we are requesting that
23 there be an amendment to the language that says
24 that if a project receives it's zoning approval
25 and then gets appealed, that they have 180 days

1 from the end of its appeal to file for its
2 building permit and still get the full tax
3 abatement. And the reason for that is, we don't
4 want a project to get appealed just for the
5 purposes of trying to get it to not get its tax
6 abatement, right? And that could happen as an
7 unintended consequence.

8 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: All right.

9 MR. JONAS: So, those are the three
10 things that we are looking for. To the point
11 that you made, we think we have shown that we
12 are willing to compromise and willing to try and
13 create a better outcome for everybody. But we
14 think that sometimes there some unintended
15 consequences that come with that. And that
16 these amendments would be thoughtful in that
17 process.

18 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Thank you.
19 Thank you for your testimony.

20 Mr. Feldman.

21 MR. FELDMAN: Thank you. I'm David
22 Feldman, Executive Director of the Development
23 Workshop. I will summarize through my written
24 testimony in the interest of time.

25 The Development Workshop fully supports

1 preservation of the ten-year tax abatement
2 because it's been instrumental in growing
3 Philadelphia, pulling the economy out of the
4 Great Recession, a time when people were
5 starting to look ten years ago at the tax
6 abatement. We saw a drop from almost 12,000
7 construction jobs in Philadelphia in 2008 to
8 9,000-plus jobs, about a 20 percent drop in one
9 year from 2008 to 2009 in construction job. And
10 it stayed down for five years.

11 This is why ten years ago and fifteen
12 years ago it was not a time to be debating it
13 because we were bleeding construction jobs. So,
14 we realize now is the time to look at this
15 debate and have the periodic evaluation
16 requirement. We think that makes sense to make
17 sure we are looking at what is the impact of any
18 change that's made and enough time to evaluate
19 that.

20 The bigger more problematic piece is, as
21 the other two presenters have said, is the
22 timeline. Our suggestion is that the deadline
23 be any project that's applied for zoning prior
24 to July 1, 2020 as opposed to building permit.

25 The example I would like to give,

1 Council President, there are three projects in
2 your district. An Councilmember Squilla, there
3 are two projects in your district that as we are
4 sitting here today across the street and across
5 Love Park, there are five projects that are at
6 CDR. I think one or two of them have already
7 been delayed and are not being even heard at the
8 CDR. They have applied for zoning a couple
9 months ago.

10 None of those five projects is going to
11 be able to get through what the City process is
12 to get through zoning and building permit to be
13 able to apply by July 1 for the tax abatement
14 application. So those are -- there are a lot of
15 projects that already somewhat far along that
16 would be hit by this -- that would be changed,
17 so that's our concern there.

18 And one thing I would like -- because
19 the question has come up, just a point of
20 information. There are about 575,000
21 residential units in the City of Philadelphia.
22 Ten years ago we had a 58 percent homeownership
23 rate, which got us to that 320/340
24 owner-occupied. We are down to about a
25 51 percent, thank you, Councilperson Parker --

1 51 percent homeownership rate. Which means, we
2 are now down 280 to 290,000 homeowners; 220,000
3 of those have Homestead Exemption; 16,000 of
4 those have LOOP. And then certain amount of
5 those have the abatement. And as the
6 Councilmember Parker pointed out, those 16,000,
7 the homeowner units under the Construction and
8 Rehab Abatement are not eligible for the
9 Homestead Exemption. Excellent point. Thank
10 you.

11 So, we are probably at something like
12 85 percent of homeowners who are eligible. And
13 quite honestly, there are a lot of homeowners
14 who don't think they are eligible because they
15 have higher incomes, and they don't know that
16 the program is because of state legislation, not
17 allowed to be targeted. And it may be an
18 excellent point that that's something to look
19 at.

20 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Thank you.
21 Thank you for your testimony.

22 Chair recognizes Councilwoman Parker.

23 COUNCILWOMAN PARKER: Thank you,
24 Mr. President. And let me say good afternoon to
25 each you. For those of you who were in the

1 Chambers earlier, I want to reference my
2 questions again to the visuals that are in front
3 of us; and particularly, in the middle where we
4 see Substantial Rehab. And there are areas, if
5 you can see the dots, where there are very few
6 from a utilization perspective.

7 My question to you as members of the
8 development community, because whatever you do,
9 it has to make good economic sense, right? And
10 we recognize that.

11 What is it that you think would need to
12 happen from a legislative perspective and
13 investment. And how do we incentive the
14 development community to work more in those
15 areas where we haven't seen great utilization of
16 this tool? Is there any, like, direction or
17 guidance that you can give to us as local
18 legislatures and go to state legislatures
19 saying, if you want us to find it to be
20 economically prudent for us to go in to work on
21 substantial rehabs and those areas, this -- hey,
22 this is what we would need you to do.

23 Because for me, the reason why the
24 commercial and the industrial side is a no
25 brainer is because of the job creation, right?

1 How can we get an industry to look at that
2 substantial rehab from an innovative perspective
3 to say, wait a minute, maybe we can make more
4 investment into a new market that's been
5 underutilized?

6 MR. JONAS: Great question. And my
7 suggestion would be the following. That one,
8 the City owns a lot of actual houses, right?
9 And the first thing I would do is take the
10 actual houses that you own and get them into the
11 market because we can fix them up cheaper than
12 we can build a new house, right?

13 And so, if you have this housing stock
14 that's out there that's underutilized and
15 doesn't get to the market, that makes it
16 difficult. So, that's the first thing we can
17 do. And if we do that, I don't know if this is
18 what you want. If we do that, that is going to
19 increase the values and create stability in some
20 neighborhoods, which would then allow us to
21 invest in other houses in those same
22 neighborhoods because you are starting to get an
23 upward trend.

24 What you are seeing is the area where
25 there is an upward trend, there is tons of

1 utilization. Where there is no upward trend,
2 there is no utilization, right? So if we can
3 get targeted in those areas that you are talking
4 about and start with houses that we can make
5 economic sense of which is -- by way of example,
6 if it costs \$230,000 to build a workforce house
7 new construction, cost \$75,000 to rehab that
8 existing house, right? What we don't have is
9 access to that existing house and if we can
10 start there, I think that would be a huge step
11 in the right direction.

12 It would get developers comfortable in
13 neighborhoods they are not in currently, right,
14 and it would start to get the discussion going
15 where you want. And then you can go to the
16 market and start to take houses from the market
17 and continue that process.

18 MR. FELDMAN: And Councilmember, I think
19 the -- using that visual is misleading in a lot
20 of ways. I think your discussion with Anne
21 Fadullon was instructive in that, in that
22 either/or.

23 So you know, Councilmember Bass, Jump
24 Start Germantown, I am not seeing enough dots to
25 represent activity of Jump Start Germantown

1 exactly because of that discussion that happened
2 earlier. So, a young developer from the
3 neighborhood -- and Councilmember
4 Quinones-Sanchez isn't in the room right now.
5 But Jump Start Kensington in that area, and I'm
6 sure Councilman Henon, some of that bleeds to
7 your district.

8 We have small mom and pop developers.
9 Developers meaning police officer who is fixing
10 up a house on the weekend that he bought that
11 was around the corner because he knew the family
12 where someone passed or my family's old neighbor
13 in Strawberry Mansion. We see rehabs, I sold
14 the house for \$80,000 that was rehabbed.
15 Because for \$25,000, you can do a rehab.

16 Well, if you are selling that to a
17 homeowner, they have got a Homestead Exemption
18 of \$45,000. Why would they trade that? So,
19 where those dots are missing exactly the
20 wonderful kind of opportunity and the kind of
21 development that is expanding the role of
22 actually safe, up to date simple rehab.

23 The model, for instance, Habitat For
24 Humanity, which I was former executive director
25 in Philadelphia, talks about clean, safe

1 affordable housing. It may not have granite
2 countertops. It may not have three bathrooms.
3 It may not have a rainfall shower, but it has a
4 brand new kitchen that went in with formica
5 countertops.

6 Maybe the stove is white and not
7 stainless steel. You know, maybe it doesn't
8 have central air. But for 80 to 150,000
9 dollars, a family was able to buy a home that
10 was newly rehabbed. The electric, the heating
11 the roof and the windows are done and half to a
12 third of their real estate tax bill is
13 completely waived by the City of Philadelphia
14 through Homestead Exemption.

15 So, I actually want to thank City
16 Council for spending \$250 million in other
17 abatements that have really addressed the
18 concerns that we have to preserve existing
19 housing and expand entry-level homeownership.

20 COUNCILWOMAN PARKER: Mr. President,
21 thank you. And I want to thank the panel. Let
22 me just say, I look forward to furthering this
23 discussion. I think you heard the President and
24 many of my colleagues note that this is sort of
25 a tweak, right, first time in 20 years. But as

1 we begin to move forward, fairness and equity in
2 this growth and upward mobility has got to be
3 the focus of this conversation. So, I look
4 forward to having that in the future.

5 MR. FELDMAN: Thank you, Councilwoman.

6 MR. JONAS: Us too.

7 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Thank you,
8 Councilwoman.

9 Chair recognizes Councilwoman Gym.

10 COUNCILWOMAN GYM: Thank you very much.
11 I will be very brief, also. Are any of you
12 familiar with the school Thomas Peirce
13 Elementary School? Have you been there.

14 MR. JONAS: I have not.

15 COUNCILWOMAN GYM: Okay. So, can you --
16 it's been in the papers recently because of
17 asbestos that was found, I think. When we did a
18 visit, a number of us went there. And you can
19 smell the bathrooms before you even hit the
20 floor in which they are on.

21 You can acknowledge the impact that
22 struggling schools have on a market as well in
23 the City of Philadelphia --

24 MR. FELDMAN: So, Councilmember I
25 appreciate your comments. And as --

1 (Audience shouts out.)

2 COUNCILWOMAN GYM: I wasn't quite done.

3 MR. FELDMAN: I want to answer the
4 question.

5 COUNCILWOMAN GYM: I understand.

6 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Hold on.
7 Hold on. Hold. on.

8 Councilwoman, were you finished?

9 COUNCILWOMAN GYM: I was not.

10 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Mr. Feldman?

11 MR. FELDMAN: I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I
12 thought that was the end of the question. I'm
13 sorry.

14 COUNCILWOMAN GYM: Sorry.

15 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Don't be so
16 anxious.

17 COUNCILWOMAN GYM: I wanted to --

18 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Let her
19 finish her question.

20 COUNCILWOMAN GYM: Per other comments,
21 you know, we are in the work of looking at
22 equitable development. You are in the business
23 of your area of work. But we are looking at
24 equity. And you can understand the impact that
25 struggling schools have on our market as well on

1 your market, in fact. And I'm wondering how in
2 encouraging the delays or other types of things
3 to changes in the abatement, how the -- how the
4 starvation of essential funding around our
5 schools, how you would offset that?

6 MR. JONAS: So, I would suggest -- I
7 agree with your point, right, which is everybody
8 wants more money for the schools. So, certainly
9 fair. I would suggest that we don't believe
10 that we are delaying the revenue coming in. We
11 believe what would happen is that a bunch of
12 stuff would have to go back to the drawing board
13 that's currently in the process that would start
14 to generate revenue for all the different parts
15 of the City. And now that stuff is not going to
16 be able to generate stuff in the short-term.

17 So, a project that was hoping to get a
18 permit in September and now the rule changed,
19 and now I go, I got to go back to the drawing
20 board. I can't do that project the way I was
21 going to. So now, I don't submit that project
22 for another twelve months. Well, I've already
23 delayed what the income was going to be twelve
24 months that way. In every way. In the
25 construction, you know, every place that there

1 is revenue made through that process gets
2 delayed because those projects have to go back
3 to the drawing board.

4 So, I think what we are trying to say
5 is, we are not trying to delay it just because
6 we don't want to start paying the money, right?
7 Obviously, I don't want to pay money when I
8 don't have to. We recognize and came here under
9 the impression that we are going to have to pay
10 more money and we are comfortable with that.

11 And what we don't want to happen is the
12 unintended consequences of, hey, look, let's
13 rush this so we can make money today. And in
14 fact, you are not making that money because the
15 process is getting delayed further because the
16 projects come off the board and then go back on.

17 COUNCILWOMAN GYM: I understand that.
18 We also heard testimony from the School District
19 earlier that a year's delay is \$61 million on
20 their end. And so, our question is, how are we
21 looking at this? If projects aren't shovel
22 ready, ready to go, we want to make sure that
23 those projects that are shovel ready, ready to
24 go, are moving in the pipeline. We certainly
25 are going to work with everybody possible to

1 make sure that they can do it.

2 But at the end of the day, if they don't
3 quite get there, it means you pay 10 percent a
4 year. That's it. It doesn't mean that you
5 don't get the abatement or that nothing happens.
6 It just means you pay in 10 percent a year, and
7 that our schools become more stable and steady
8 and that we can work with other things. This is
9 an evolving process.

10 But you know, part of the goal is to
11 recognize that there is a level of urgency
12 around consequences that are not just
13 individually related or just project related but
14 that are significant because, in aggregate, the
15 schools pay \$61 million for a year's delay. And
16 that is not something that I think your industry
17 can offset right now.

18 MR. JONAS: Right. So, totally agree
19 with that.

20 (Applause.)

21 MR. JONAS: I agree with you a hundred
22 percent. Delaying \$61 million is not a good
23 option, right? The question is, did we sit down
24 collectively and look at what we really thought
25 would happen to the projects that are in the

1 pipeline, and what would that really mean
2 revenue wise? Because if it was \$61 million, I
3 think that that's a fair discussion. I don't
4 believe that that's the number. And I don't
5 believe that us industry and Council have sat
6 down together and really done that math
7 collectively to say, hey, what is this really
8 and how do we come to something this is a
9 compromise for both of us versus just kind of
10 throwing a number out there, which is a correct
11 number if all your assumptions are right.

12 What we are saying is, we don't think
13 you thought through the entire process. We
14 don't think those assumptions are a hundred
15 percent correct.

16 COUNCILWOMAN GYM: I'm just saying that
17 we are the ones who went to Thomas Peirce
18 School.

19 MR. JONAS: And I'm just saying --

20 COUNCILWOMAN GYM: Thank you, Council
21 President.

22 MR. JONAS: Can I just respond to that?
23 You know, so, just from a school perspective,
24 right, with the thought that we don't care about
25 the schools, right? So, we are actively working

1 with schools; the Laureate Academy, which is one
2 of the highest risk -- dealing with one of the
3 highest at-risk populations of students in the
4 City, right? Providing scholarships, looking to
5 provide buildings for them, working through the
6 process of trying to help the schools, right?

7 So, the narrative that, hey, look, if
8 you don't -- if you don't believe in this, then
9 you don't believe in helping the schools isn't
10 really a fair narrative. The fair narrative is,
11 let's look at where the dollars are getting
12 spent at -- (Audience cries out response.)

13 Fair enough.

14 I am just saying, again, everybody wants
15 to help the schools. The question really is, is
16 what you are proposing, what's the real dollar
17 effect.

18 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Thank you.
19 Hold on. Thank you. And thank you for your
20 testimony. Going to move on.

21 Real quick, though. I just want to give
22 you -- Councilman Oh kind of touched on it.
23 This is really about the person in the
24 neighborhood, particularly the person in the
25 neighborhood that is "gentrifying" increased

1 values, the whole nine yards. That person
2 bought a house 20 years ago. They are there.
3 And the development comes in. And there are a
4 bunch of homes that are sold high value --
5 5/6/700,000, whatever, right?

6 And the concern for that individual, I'm
7 told, could conceivably be every year that that
8 tax phases out, that there will be more tax
9 liability on that individual. I am assuming
10 that will be the concern of the development
11 community because you guys are building.

12 But the concern from the existing
13 residents, because I represent a couple of those
14 areas is, you know what happens in those
15 neighborhoods when the values in those
16 neighborhoods for the existing homeowners goes
17 up, they get a letter every year from their
18 mortgage company. And they say, you know what,
19 your escrow account is going to go up, right,
20 because your values and your taxes are going to
21 increase every year in the foreseeable future.
22 And you know what those residents do? They send
23 in that check for that escrow account.

24 So, they are figuring out a way. And
25 it's much more burdensome for them to adjust

1 because they want to stay in their homes. So
2 all due respect, I think that the people who
3 have a phase down on their tax abatement will
4 probably figure out a way to adjust. All right?
5 Because I think what we are proposing here is a
6 reasonable approach. We got to have equity,
7 right? And there are a lot of people who don't
8 think we are going far enough, all due respect.

9 But we want to reach -- we want to reach
10 a reasonable approach. Because at some point,
11 any I you all -- this has to change. Can't -- I
12 can't keep looking in the faces of individuals
13 and telling people, said, well, I know. And
14 they say, Darrell, my taxes keep going up. And
15 this guy built this house. I don't even like
16 the way it looks, right? It's four stories. I
17 got a two story. I ain't got to tell you. You
18 guys know what's going on out there. At some
19 point, you know, you have to adjust.

20 This has been a 20-year run. The simple
21 reality is that we are at a point in time where
22 we think we are approaching a meaningful change
23 that will provide significant revenues to the
24 School District while continuing to stimulate
25 the market.

1 Thank you, again. I want to thank you
2 because you guys have been one of the few
3 organizations that I got to say is willing to
4 always have a reasonable conversation to talk
5 about possibilities of this making a change.

6 I want to thank you all. Thank you for
7 your testimony so much.

8 MR. JONAS: Thank you, as well.

9 MR. FELDMAN: Thank you.

10 MR. MARANSKY: Thanks.

11 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Thank you
12 guys.

13 Next up. We will have panel three --
14 (Audience members continues to shout out.)

15 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Come on, my
16 man. Sir, it's okay.

17 Next up, we will have Madam Shakumba,
18 Rhea Powell, Gail Loney and Ron Whitehorne.

19 (Approaches Witness Table.)

20 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: That's
21 Ms. Loney. That's a Fifth District resident.
22 Come on up. You all can self-select. Just
23 state your name for the record and proceed with
24 your testimony. We want to try to limit your
25 testimony to two, three minutes. We got a lot

1 of people on the list.

2 MS. POWELL: Good afternoon. My name is
3 Rhea Powell. I'm here in support of Ordinance
4 190944, which would modify tax abatements for
5 new construction and improvement costs such that
6 they decrease over time instead of remaining
7 fixed.

8 I commend Council on this first step
9 towards reforming what should be a targeted and
10 fair system of tax incentives, one with clear
11 goals and transparent assessment of its impacts.
12 I do not doubt that the abatement has
13 contributed to development over the nearly two
14 decades that it has been in its current form.
15 But although we know that the abatements have
16 likely contributed to development, we cannot
17 know to what degree some of that development
18 might have happened in the absence of such a
19 broad and untargeted abatement.

20 Economic and demographic shifts have
21 also played a role in the growth of the City in
22 parsing out which factors have had what degree
23 of impact is complex. What we do know is that
24 the growth and development that has occurred in
25 recent years has not been uniform across the

1 City. The majority of abated properties are
2 concentrated within the greater Center City
3 area. And many of the neighborhoods that have
4 seen the most development and reaped the
5 greatest tax benefits are the very same
6 neighborhoods where growth is likely to occur,
7 even the absence of a generous tax abatement.

8 Meanwhile, neighborhoods with less
9 favorable market values, the neighborhoods that
10 stand to gain the most from development
11 incentives have not seen the same growth. The
12 blanket abatement may be equally available, but
13 it has not been equitable -- it has not had an
14 equitable impact across the City.

15 We also know that even though high value
16 properties represent a small percentage of the
17 total number of abated properties, they make up
18 a significant portion of the total tax benefits.
19 And in the last 20 years, properties with tax
20 abatements received over 1 billion dollars in
21 tax benefits. And over half of those benefits
22 go to a relatively small number of high value
23 properties.

24 As a parent of children in the School
25 District of Philadelphia, I cannot help but

1 think how some of that revenue might otherwise
2 have been used. Even if you are not a parent,
3 anyone who opens the Inquirer can read about
4 crumbling infrastructure and insufficient
5 support for our schools. Buildings that expose
6 our children and our educators the toxins like
7 lead and asbestos and educators who try to meet
8 our children's needs with limited resources.

9 In a time of utmost need for our
10 schools, it's imperative that there are clear
11 and specific goals for any tax incentives, and
12 that the City regularly reevaluates whether the
13 goals are being met and if the benefits of
14 development outweigh the costs of foregone
15 revenue. The changes to the abatement that are
16 proposed in this bill are for one path for
17 change, but other options exist such as
18 targeting the abatement to areas where
19 reinvestment is needed most, capping the
20 abatement to set limits on benefits for high-end
21 properties, excluding revenue for the School
22 District from the abatement or ending it
23 outright.

24 With any number of ways to support
25 school and City in front of you, I urge that you

1 consider this a first step in creating a smart
2 targeted tax incentive program that supports all
3 of our schools and all of our City.

4 Thank you.

5 (Applause.)

6 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Thank you so
7 much for your testimony.

8 MS. LONEY: Hi. My name is Gail Loney.
9 And I'm a block captain in a neighborhood in the
10 Fifth District. I'm not going to read my whole
11 paper. I submitted it through email, but I will
12 say this.

13 I live in a community that I believe was
14 and still is intentionally divested in. And the
15 only investment is to rid the community that is
16 there now for what I call the power brokers want
17 it to be in the future. We constantly hear
18 about the developers and construction industry
19 and how they bring jobs, which is supposed to
20 bring stability to our City. But no one is
21 talking about the people factor, the jobs we as
22 poor Black people don't necessarily get or keep.

23 Jobs for two years is fine, but a job
24 for twenty-five years is better. Education is
25 not fine. The playing field is not level. Your

1 ZIP code should not determine anything about you
2 other than this is the area you happen to live
3 in right now, but somehow it does. This has to
4 end.

5 The abatement is meant to bring business
6 in and that is what it is doing. But at what
7 costs? When you have neighborhoods that are
8 experiencing development on steroids, backhoes,
9 blocked streets, dirty air, noise pollution.
10 And then once built, no air, no light and in
11 some cases no respect for your neighbors. While
12 the developers are building 500 to 800,000
13 dollar homes in communities that the people
14 that -- that the people there can't afford and
15 mega apartment buildings for students, though
16 everyone denies it, are being built.

17 Those that have been there through drug
18 wars, gang wars are still suffering through
19 construction wars only to be on the verge of
20 being taxed out of these homes. Elderly are
21 being solicited by speculators calling and
22 leaving cards at their home on a daily basis
23 only to sell their homes they own and go where?
24 Somewhere, they have to pay rent. And then what
25 happens? The rent goes up too high because the

1 landlord wants to kick them out to do a paint
2 job and to get more money for that place.

3 Homeownership is something that has been
4 for me made possible by my parents who found a
5 way to leave some wealth for my family, but
6 everyone does not have that. This abatement
7 could have been a really good thing for
8 businesses and communities. Had our government
9 kept up with redeveloping working class
10 neighborhoods and putting our tax dollars back
11 to help those in need steadily over the years,
12 we may not have become the largest poor City in
13 the nation.

14 However, since that did not happen, we
15 are -- we are -- here we are with
16 gentrification, workforce housing and affordable
17 housing that just keeps pushing homeownership
18 further out of the reach of everyone. Because
19 none of those words speak to the truth that
20 incomes of \$40,000 dollars or less can't pay for
21 \$300,000 housing or rents of \$1,000 a month. In
22 our neighborhoods, we see the developers when
23 they come to ask for variances and rezoning for
24 large construction projects we have had no say
25 in developing.

1 The RCOs were a mechanism for the people
2 to have say in their communities how they should
3 look, how tall, wide, even color. But now in
4 some cases, even the RCOs seem to be
5 compromised, totally made up of well-connected
6 developers, property managers for landlords and
7 realtors. Even the plans can be totally in
8 opposition to the look of the block, street or
9 neighborhood. But we are not a factor.

10 Homes for the aging population is not a
11 consideration unless for elderly. Notice, aging
12 and elderly are not the same. Not much for
13 disabled either. In a complex of 170 units, not
14 one -- not one for disabled person or five for
15 low income and maybe only five, and that's not
16 every building. They come with the knowledge
17 that the City already supports anything and
18 everything they do in our neighborhoods. And
19 sometimes, the outright arrogance is evident
20 because they wear it well.

21 Since they support our officials, our
22 officials support them. And when we oppose, we
23 are just -- you know, we are just in the way,
24 rabble rousers who don't even live in the
25 neighborhood, which is what they would like to

1 believe. But that's -- but that's just it. We
2 do live in the neighborhood, but you don't know
3 that because you think our neighborhoods are all
4 made up of all the same types of people.
5 Everyone does not scream running from the
6 neighborhood because they have a little success.
7 Every one of these neighborhoods is not a drug
8 deal or is uneducated.

9 To the contrary, our neighborhoods are
10 made up of firefighters, teachers, bus drivers,
11 retired teachers, business owners just to name a
12 few. We look out, share and care for one
13 another. We help each other being there in
14 their time of need. There are young adults and
15 the elderly. And they are not always at odds.
16 We have block clubs clean our streets and care
17 about our homes. Our kids are well behaved,
18 smart and educated. They travel and have dreams
19 and deserve homes in the neighborhood of their
20 choice.

21 Please consider thoughtfully and wisely
22 the scope of this and other bills and how and
23 why they effect your constituencies. This bill
24 should be held for further discussion and
25 amended considering the many factors involved.

1 I have only named a few, but ten years is too
2 long with no plan showing how the money finally
3 received will be used for the betterment of our
4 schools and assistance to our aging housing
5 situation and property owners.

6 Thank you.

7 (Applause.)

8 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Thank you for
9 your testimony.

10 MR. WHITEHORNE: Good afternoon,
11 Councilmembers and my fellow Philadelphians in
12 the room today. My name is Ron Whitehorne. I'm
13 representing 215 Peoples Alliance.

14 I have lived in this City for over fifty
15 years. And along with my wife, raised two
16 children who attended public schools. I taught
17 in the same schools for 23 years, and own a home
18 in the Lawncrest section of Northeast
19 Philadelphia where we resided for over two
20 decades.

21 For many years, I've been actively
22 campaigning for the repeal of the tax abatement.
23 In my mind, it is a symbol of the work
24 priorities of those who hold political and
25 economic power in our City. It is a tail of two

1 cities. On the one hand, we have students who
2 are disproportionately black, brown and poor and
3 who have no choice but to go to under-resourced
4 schools where their health is at risk because of
5 the presence of lead, asbestos and other toxic
6 materials in aging, poorly maintained buildings.

7 On the other hand, we have corporations
8 that make billions in profits and developers of
9 luxury condominiums who are the recipients of
10 the ten-year tax abatement, a generous gift
11 which confers no obligations on them. Those who
12 benefit from this policy are disproportionately
13 white and affluent. Ironically, many of those
14 who purchased tax-abated properties in the
15 gentrifying neighborhoods that surround the City
16 Center leave the City when their children reach
17 school age.

18 Another dimension of this tale is the
19 growing housing crisis in the City. Working
20 class homeowners see their property taxes rise.
21 Market forces fueled by the abatement are
22 squeezing renters as the pull of affordable
23 housing declines. These consequences confront
24 the members of Council with an imperative to
25 act.

1 The current bill, while perhaps better
2 than nothing, is woefully inadequate as a means
3 of addressing the problem. We want an end to
4 the tax abatement, not a piecemeal phasing out.
5 And want it to cover commercial properties.

6 The notion that we need the abatement to
7 create jobs for Philadelphians is a cruel hoax.
8 Unlike in some other cities where abatements are
9 linked to commitment to create jobs, low income
10 housing or other social benefits, here
11 recipients make no such guarantees. And while
12 creating corporate office towers and luxury
13 condos certainly generate some jobs, it is
14 questionable that the economic benefits are
15 equitably shared by Philadelphia residents.

16 Of course we need development, but the
17 question is what kind? We want development that
18 helps our school children develop their
19 intellect, their imagination and their ability
20 to sell their labor in today's competitive
21 markets. We want development that provides
22 adequate housing for all our people. We want
23 the revenue that ending the abatement will
24 generate uses of downpayments to fix our toxic
25 schools and build affordable housing for working

1 class residents. Both these projects will
2 generate jobs at the same time they create
3 positive social benefits.

4 Finally, we want to object to the lack
5 of transparency and inclusion in crafting
6 legislation to address this and related
7 problems. I notice the developers seem to have
8 regular access to Council and their views are
9 taken very seriously. We want to make it clear
10 that we will continue to press our demands,
11 demands that we believe have broad support as
12 indicated by the recent election. We hope for
13 regardless of the verdict on this legislation,
14 Council will revisit these issues in next year's
15 session and hear the voices of the residents of
16 our City.

17 Thank you.

18 MS. GREEN: Good evening, Tiffany Green,
19 Concerned Citizens of Point Breeze. I want to
20 start off with the fact that I think this
21 particular proposal, I mean, this bill is a fake
22 out. It's a fake out because the fact of it is,
23 it's still a ten-year tax abatement you are
24 still providing these people.

25 And my concern is that we are sitting

1 here with Council, many of who, with all due
2 respect, have stated and fought for children on
3 many levels. But yet, voted for to accelerate
4 permits for developers in many of our areas, 17
5 to 0. For me that's being hypocritical in many,
6 many ways.

7 But lets get down to the details because
8 the City of Philadelphia is not losing any
9 money. You get your money off of the transfer
10 fees up front. So when you get your money off
11 the transfers fees up front, the ten-year tax
12 abatement, you are not really losing any money
13 at all. So the point of it is, when you have
14 condominiums like 500 Walnut Street and you have
15 the Laurel which has from 26 to the 52nd floor
16 all condominiums starting from \$2 million to
17 \$15 million, and they are all getting ten-year
18 tax abatements with no particular cap at all,
19 you are making a lot of money off of those
20 transfer fees that's coming in up front.

21 So the question is -- and then you have
22 not only that, you have the highest \$17.85
23 million condominium was sold at 500 Walnut
24 Street that received a ten-year tax abatement.
25 I mean, what do we say here? It's like as far

1 as I'm saying, this is a fake out. Because of
2 the fact when you have a -- when you get the
3 transfer fees, what are you doing with the
4 money. If it's not going to our schools, then
5 where is the money going to?

6 Well, let's talk about where the money
7 is going to. The money is, according to Alan
8 Greenberg back in 2009, you have to places and
9 new events for newcomers to come in. So, who
10 help, was it allegedly, money -- \$15 million put
11 towards the fixing up of Dilworth Plaza?

12 Another 25 million allegedly was given towards
13 the Gallery to fix that up. Who fixed up Penns
14 Landing. You are fixing up Love Park.

15 So, let's talk about how you are
16 directing your money and everything, and then
17 you want to sit here and say you care about our
18 children. You see them in dirty, rundown
19 schools. You see them with asbestos, but yet
20 you are sprucing up your own house. It's like
21 you are at your house. You are wearing new
22 clothes, but your house is falling down. You
23 know what I mean?

24 The thing is, let's not fake the
25 community out. This tax abatement needs to be

1 put -- it needs to go. It needs to go down to
2 three years -- three years. Councilman Goode
3 did the numbers on it. I don't quite have it,
4 so I'm not going to quote him. But the thing
5 about it is, is at this point, it needs to go
6 down to three years -- 100, 50, 25 and you're
7 out or it needs to be ended at this particular
8 point. Because if you continue on, you are just
9 really running everybody else into the ground.

10 The Homestead is also not real because
11 we are being taxed assessed like Councilman Oh.
12 You are assessing us. We have people who
13 started out at 50, but now they are up to 80.
14 Then they are up to 125, 170. So if you
15 reassess us at 170 and take off 40,000, we at
16 130. You reassess us at 200,000, you take off
17 40, we at 160. So, the Homestead is really not
18 helping because you allow them to continue to
19 build in new construction. You continue to give
20 them the ten-year tax abatement.

21 And then you continue to reassess us.
22 And then you want to sit here and say that you
23 are helping, you care about the poor, you care
24 about the children and all this stuff. Yet, you
25 are continually voting for new zoning code, new

1 policies where you are giving developers
2 different bonuses. If they do a green roof,
3 they are allowed to get ten extra units in a
4 luxury apartment which is -- who knew that?
5 That wasn't on the poster boards when the
6 Planning Commission came down to us and said
7 they want to do mixed housing.

8 You say you are doing mixed housing,
9 mixed income, but you are not doing mixed
10 housing and mixed income down in Center City.
11 When it comes down here, they get exclusion if
12 they give a little money to the Housing
13 Department. But at that particular point,
14 there's no mixed housing. It's only mixed
15 housing in the black community, in the black and
16 poor community. But it's not mixed housing,
17 mixed income in these luxury apartments like the
18 Laurel and 500 Walnut Street.

19 And we can go all the way down to all
20 the money that you are pulling in from the
21 transfer fees. I think that this really needs
22 to be put on hold. If you are going to have a
23 real conversation, then have a real conversation
24 because our children are suffering at this
25 particular with dirty schools, dirty schools.

1 And at this point, I feel as though that we have
2 been at this for a long time. We really --
3 Philadelphia is really have -- we are at two
4 different towns. We have poor/poor and upper
5 income. You are catering to the newcomers and
6 you are leaving the low income on the
7 backburner. So what are you -- which way are
8 you going? And you are getting the transfer
9 fee.

10 And then you take one building, one
11 developer gets a ten-year tax abatement. And he
12 can then transfer to 200 units a ten-year tax
13 abatement. So then with the 200 units, you
14 still getting money off the transfer fees up
15 front, you know, because some of our new
16 residents tell us these things. That's how we
17 know these things. The thing of mine is, if you
18 are making money off of 300,000-dollar house and
19 let's say you have -- you are making \$17,000 to
20 transfer fee, you are getting the money.

21 So, where is the money? Where is the
22 money? Because you are getting the money up
23 front. That's the bottom line. And so, this
24 ten-year tax abatement is going to end. If
25 somebody pays \$17 million and got a ten-year tax

1 abatement, then you know at this point, we all
2 need to go back to the drawing board.

3 Thank you.

4 (Applause.)

5 MS. MITCHELL: Good afternoon to the
6 Council and, well, President Clarke is not
7 sitting right there but good afternoon to him
8 anyway. My name is Diane Hamilton Mitchell.
9 For the last 55 years, I have lived in the 1300
10 Block of South 15th Street. First time
11 grandmother. And I am hoping that within the
12 next 20 years, I should be able to maintain my
13 home that was given to me.

14 Right here I am holding up a printout
15 that Bershaw Hathoway sent to me starting with a
16 house that started at 130,000 up to 775,000.
17 And they are not paying taxes. And it's 85
18 houses. I decided since I retired from the
19 school system, I refused to be a realtor because
20 I refuse to go in my neighborhood and go on the
21 computer and look for houses that are backed up
22 in their taxes. And that's what some of these
23 developers are doing and realtors.

24 I have a folder here. This is a folder
25 that I keep account of all the realtors and

1 developers are calling me to sell my house and
2 my neighbors. I own a -- I am on a fixed income
3 of \$990. And I survive off the grace of God.
4 That's what I survive off. And not just me, a
5 lot of people. I can't believe that
6 Philadelphia has allowed developers to come in
7 here and take our homes from us.

8 They are not paying taxes for 20 years.
9 Twenty years I might not be here. We are not
10 guaranteed anything, but this needs to stop. We
11 are not -- this is not brotherly love anymore.
12 This is called, where's the money?

13 When you have -- when I had to give up
14 my car because I had no place to park. I have
15 to pay \$20 -- no, \$35 a year to park in front of
16 my door, so I gave up my car. And my slogan is,
17 if I pay property tax, I should be able to park
18 in front of my door.

19 Right now the problem with the school
20 system with the asbestos is out of hand. We all
21 knew what was going on. If a house is built
22 1915 like my house is built, and we got asbestos
23 out of our basement. Right now my sister worked
24 at Benjamin Franklin High. She's coughing
25 because she might be a victim like the young

1 lady at Meredith school was, okay?

2 The tax abatement is getting out of
3 hand. You have people knocking on your door,
4 taking pictures of your house, going on the
5 internet. Here is a picture of my house. A
6 picture of my house. How dare you violate me.
7 And I know we have a open policy that all this
8 information is on philly.gov. But listen, when
9 they call me and ask me for 100,000 for my
10 house, you can't buy my dream. You can't buy my
11 history. You can't buy my home.

12 Councilman, I am begging you, I am
13 begging you, let's end this abatement and we got
14 to end it now. Because what's going to happen
15 is it's going to happen to all of us. Maybe
16 some of you guys can afford a house that's
17 750,000, but I can't. I paid my taxes. I do my
18 duty. I'm a block captain. We don't -- we
19 connect with one another in our neighborhood.
20 You took the neighborhood that was South Philly
21 and now we are New Bold and Center City South
22 and Point Breeze. You took the neighborhood and
23 you divide it. And when you divide it, that's
24 when the racism start.

25 We have new neighbors that piss in front

1 of my door with their dogs. They don't want to
2 speak. I have to speak to them before they can
3 give me eye contact. Headphones are on. This
4 situation right here brings in racism and we
5 don't need that. If we going to be brotherly
6 love/sisterly affection, we better do it now.

7 Let's end this tax abatement. Let's end
8 it now. Thank you so much.

9 (Councilman Henon sitting in as Chair.)

10 COUNCILMAN HENON: Thank you. Our next
11 panel will be Ben Connors, Christopher Somers,
12 Chris Johnson and Andrea Moselle, if that is
13 correct. We are going to move to a time limit,
14 two minutes because we still have a lot of
15 public comment and several panels ahead of us.

16 Thank you all for being here and hanging
17 in here so long.

18 (Approaches Witness Table.)

19 COUNCILMAN HENON: If you could, start
20 off by stating your name for the record. And
21 you can proceed.

22 MS. MOSELLE: Yes. Good afternoon. I
23 am Andrea Moselle. And I've lived in Mt. Airy
24 for over forty years. As the parent of three
25 grown children who graduate from Philadelphia

1 schools and a grandparent of a 3 and a half year
2 old that lives in South Philly. I am here as a
3 believer in great public education for all
4 Philadelphia's children.

5 My experience as a mental health
6 professional with a background in child
7 development and early childhood education
8 reinforces what every parent and grandparent in
9 this room already knows. Children and staff are
10 entitled to go to school in safe and healthy
11 buildings. As a member of the Power Interfaith
12 and the City Schools Coalition, I've been
13 working with parents, teachers, students and
14 community members for the last three years to
15 end the abatement and return the resulting real
16 estate tax dollars to our schools.

17 As many Councilmembers who we visited
18 know, we have studied the facts about abatement
19 and the findings are clear. The abatement takes
20 desperately needed funds away from our schools,
21 land and affordable housing and keeps them in
22 the pockets of wealthy developers and builders.
23 Despite the encouragement that many of you gave
24 us in these conversations, you chose to work
25 behind closed doors to create the legislation

1 introduced last week.

2 We see this bill as a first step in
3 addressing the issue and returning some of the
4 money to the School District of Philadelphia.
5 And as such, we will support a yes vote. But
6 the phase out of the abatement you have proposed
7 is very gradual, and our children cannot wait
8 the eight to ten years it will take to bring
9 back enough of the lost revenue to begin to make
10 a significant impact. And they certainly cannot
11 wait the five years proposed by the building
12 trades unions for the phase out to even begin.

13 Each week we learn about more
14 unacceptable toxic conditions at schools across
15 the District. We will be back in January to ask
16 you, how you will find a way to bring the
17 necessary funds to our schools this coming year
18 to end the toxic conditions. We expect you to
19 recognize this is an emergency and to move with
20 all urgency. We need you to do what your
21 constituents elected you to do and take a stand
22 for Philadelphia's children.

23 Thank you.

24 COUNCILMAN HENON: Thank you for your
25 testimony.

1 MR. SOMERS: Good afternoon. My name is
2 Christopher Somers. I'm a realtor in the City
3 of Philadelphia. And I'm the current president
4 of the Greater Philadelphia Association of
5 Realtors. With over three thousand hard working
6 members, GPAR has served as the voice of real
7 estate in Philadelphia since 1908. Thank you
8 for the opportunity to testify today regarding
9 Bill No. 190944.

10 GPAR does not support the bill as it is
11 written currently. While we understand the
12 intent and efforts behind the bill, we would
13 like to offer amendments to the bill and the
14 reasons behind them. We would like to request
15 this Committee keeping the 100 percent tax
16 abatement for new construction for the first
17 four years of the ten-year tax abatement with a
18 gradual decline as mentioned in our detailed
19 testimony. This will reduce the full value of
20 the tax abatement from seven years to ten years
21 while making sure the real estate market is not
22 destabilized because of a radicle change and
23 maintaining the incentive for home buyers to
24 purchase a house.

25 We would also request the effective date

1 for the enforcement of the bill be January 1,
2 2021, which would provide some time for
3 transactions to work through the paperwork in
4 relation to permits and zoning processes.
5 Additionally, it will help in predicting the
6 market forces which is already witnessing a
7 downward turn. Our proposed amendments will
8 lessen the shock wave that may be created
9 through amending this tax abatement policy.

10 Our primary concern is the homeowners.
11 It is important to make sure the homeowners and
12 consumers are protected from any drastic change
13 that could negatively effect their ability to
14 obtain a stable source of funding from mortgages
15 for concluding the process of buying a house.
16 We also need to create more certainty and
17 provide more time along title companies in
18 calculate the escrow amount for the impending
19 payment of Real Estate Tax.

20 A specific real life example I would
21 encourage people to drive by tonight or tomorrow
22 or any time is a project at Frankford and Lehigh
23 where the City was collecting maybe, if they
24 were collecting it, around \$10,000 a year of
25 real estate taxes. Now it's currently \$50,000.

1 And over the ten years, it will end up being
2 700,000 in real estate taxes of the tenth year.
3 This also provides over \$2 million in transfer
4 taxes. These sales are in the \$300,000 range,
5 created tons of jobs with 155 homeowners and
6 occupants. We can safely say that without the
7 tax abatement, this would still be an abandoned
8 used car lot today.

9 Thus, we look forward to working with
10 City Council to make the bill work for everyone
11 and ensure the economy of the City of
12 Philadelphia is not negatively effected by
13 changing the tax abatement dramatically. Once
14 again, we do not support Bill No. 190944 as it
15 is currently drafted.

16 Thank you for your consideration of the
17 thoughts expressed by GPAR and myself as
18 president of the association.

19 COUNCILMAN HENON: Thank you. Next
20 speaker, state your name for the record. You
21 may proceed.

22 MR. CONNORS: I'm Ben Connors, president
23 of the General Building Contractors Association.
24 GBCA represents over 290 union commercial and
25 industrial institutional general contractors,

1 subcontractors, material suppliers and
2 construction service firms throughout the
3 Greater Philadelphia region.

4 We would like to thank the Council for
5 allowing us a chance to testify on Bill No.
6 190944. I'm here to express the construction
7 industry's grave concerns about the impact to
8 the economy that any reduction in the current
9 property tax abatement would have.

10 While ours is an industry that builds in
11 concrete and steel, it shouldn't be estimated
12 how fragile of an industry it should be. Cost
13 increase to an industry can easily deter further
14 redevelopment or grind new development to a
15 screeching halt. And it's not just -- this is
16 important. It's not just developers that rely
17 on the tax abatement to build our City, it's the
18 general contractors and subcontractors we
19 represent. It's architects and engineers,
20 lawyers, accountants, material suppliers and
21 countless other companies who support the
22 construction industry.

23 Nearly 40,000 jobs are directly or
24 indirectly supported by the real estate industry
25 in Philadelphia. These are good paying jobs.

1 The types of jobs we need more of not less of in
2 our City. The construction of the a building
3 impacts so many people and so many industries
4 from all those who rely on planning and
5 construction of the building for their
6 livelihood to the countless restaurants and
7 businesses that benefit from new residents.
8 Each residential project is an economic engine
9 for the City generating jobs and income, tax
10 revenue. And a reduction to the abatement puts
11 as brake on that engine.

12 GBCA does support amending the bill to
13 ensure that some of these negative impacts can
14 be weathered by our industry. In particular, we
15 do urge Council to change the implementation
16 date to July of 2021. On large apartment or
17 condo projects like those that are built by GBCA
18 members, these costs can take up to two years to
19 develop some of these projects. And on the
20 front end, a lot of these costs are going to be
21 borne by the contractors who do preconstruction
22 and won't recoup those costs until after the
23 project is completed.

24 So, projects currently in consideration
25 now that wouldn't be done in time for the

1 current deadline for this project, those costs
2 would not necessarily be borne by developers,
3 they would be borne by the small business owners
4 that will eventually build those projects
5 hopefully.

6 Additionally, we would like
7 consideration to change the amendments so that
8 it's a hundred percent abatement for the first
9 five years and declining in percentage in the
10 next five. Again, our industry in particular
11 when getting a construction loan to build a
12 project, the first five years are critical for
13 qualifying for that loan. Reducing the
14 abatement right in the front is going to make it
15 less likely some of the projects that currently
16 qualify for loan will get it in the future.

17 In conclusion, over the past 128 years,
18 GBCA members built this City. We built our
19 schools, our government buildings, our offices.
20 And many of the apartment and condo buildings
21 that our citizens live in. And we want to make
22 sure Philadelphia succeeds. So we do want to
23 point out, we applaud City Council for not
24 seeking to modify the commercial and industrial
25 abatements. What the City needs more, if

1 anything else, is jobs. And these abatement are
2 critical to incentivize future growth and jobs
3 in the City.

4 So, we hope Council will support the
5 proposed amendments I have discussed. And thank
6 you for your time and consideration.

7 COUNCILMAN HENON: Thanks.

8 Chris, if you can state your name for
9 the record. And you may proceed.

10 MR. JOHNSON: Yes, hello. My name is
11 Chris Johnson. And I am here on behalf of my
12 testimony. So, I am here this testimony, more
13 so to tell my story.

14 In 2017, I -- me, my fiancée, my two
15 kids were renters like a lot of people in
16 Philadelphia. We rented a house in York Town, a
17 3 bedroom, one bath driveway which is a great
18 house. But 2017, we said this would be our last
19 rental property just because the expenses were
20 killing us. It was \$1,500 per month plus
21 utilities. We were looking at \$2,000 per month
22 just to rent.

23 We buckled down. We moved into an area
24 we didn't want to be, but the rent was very low.
25 So, we lived there for about 16 to 18 months to

1 save money, build our credit, reduce our debt.
2 And we started home shopping during that 16 to
3 18 month span.

4 We looked in Jersey. We looked in
5 Delaware. And of course, we looked in
6 Philadelphia because we are both born and raised
7 here. Our kids were born here and they go to
8 school here. So, as looking in Jersey and
9 Delaware, some of you might know they also offer
10 tax abatement, which is five years. And then we
11 came back to Philadelphia. And Philadelphia
12 agent also said they offer tax abatements, as
13 well. So, we said why not stay in Philadelphia
14 where we are from and they have a ten-year tax
15 abatement, which was beneficial to us.

16 So, during that time, we hit the ground
17 hard looking for a perfect opportunity for us
18 during that 18 months span when we looked into
19 rental property. Mind you, it was a duplex, it
20 was two bedroom and it was four of us.

21 So during the time of the home searching
22 in Philadelphia, like I said, we had a great
23 opportunity come up. A new construction house
24 in Philadelphia, some of the areas that you guys
25 probably live in. And like I said, we hit the

1 ground hard. And we just did what was necessary
2 to acquire a new construction property. We
3 didn't want a renovation. We didn't want to
4 order home. We wanted a new construction where
5 we could raise our kids and they could live in
6 Philadelphia. We didn't want to live in New
7 Jersey. We didn't want to live in Delaware just
8 because we work here and play here and our
9 friends and family are here.

10 So, we didn't want to take our money to
11 another state, another city that will benefit
12 somebody else's kids or just the city. So after
13 all that said and done, we settled on our house
14 last December, actually December 18 of last
15 year. So, our year anniversary is coming up
16 already on a new construction house. Yes,
17 ten-year tax abatement is applied to the house.
18 And we are benefiting from that abatement. And
19 we didn't have -- we don't make a ton of money.

20 But like I said, we reduced our expenses
21 and increased our income, reduced our debt. And
22 we were able to acquire a new build with a
23 ten-year tax abatement. And then our daughter
24 and our other son could be Philadelphians just
25 like the rest of us.

1 So, that's our story. And we benefited
2 off the tax abatement basically.

3 COUNCILMAN HENON: Thank you for coming
4 in.

5 (Applause.)

6 Our next panel. Going to call Ming Wu,
7 Christi Clarke, and Boris Kaplan.

8 (Approaches Witness Table.)

9 MR. WU: Hi. My name is Ming Wu. I'm a
10 Furness High School graduate, a current CCP
11 student. A youth organizers with HMA United. I
12 living in the Second District. I am here to
13 push City Council to vote yes on the first step
14 on ending the tax abatement, but this not
15 enough. We must end the tax abatement now.

16 I living through the damage of the
17 school budget cut that happened year after year.
18 My school ceiling leak. My teacher will bucket
19 on the floor to collect rain water while we
20 expect to go on learning like this was normal.
21 The paint on the wall peals. Many class will
22 missing teacher. I almost did not make it to
23 college because my college counselor have too
24 many students. I was lucky I had help from a UN
25 and other friends. Others were not as lucky.

1 I was shocked by the school conditions I
2 find here, the richest country in the world.
3 Three years later, those conditions still not
4 change. Over the summer I work with 27 youth
5 who interviewed over 400 Philadelphia public
6 school students about their school conditions.
7 Here is what we hear. There is a shortage of
8 tables and chairs for students. The ceiling
9 also have cracks, which sometimes water will
10 leak through. Student at Northeast High School.

11 The ceiling paint will fell on the
12 student and the table and distract them during
13 class. Student at Washington Elementary School.
14 Is has become too hard to concentrate when
15 classroom don't have air conditioning. Student
16 at Northeast High School.

17 Ninety-two percent of student were
18 interviewed report damaged facilities. More
19 than half of students report a lack of air
20 conditioning. Seventy-eight percent report lack
21 of teaching materials. In addition, half of the
22 student had no interpreter in their school. How
23 is this possible? By ending the tax abatement,
24 we have a real chance to advance in our youth.

25 Last year, Palumbo roof fell in. Ben

1 Franklin and SLA were closed because of
2 damage -- dangerous conditions. Peirce
3 Elementary just make headline. Why won't City
4 Council push the health and safety for our young
5 people first. With this current bill on the
6 abatement, we will -- also no money.

7 Next year --

8 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Sir, you got
9 to -- time is up. Can you wrap it up, please?

10 MR. WU: Okay. And limit money for year
11 to come. This is why in the new year, we will
12 continue to push City Council to end the
13 abatement. We will push to make sure we are
14 part of review process of the bill. And we will
15 push to see that this money is returned to
16 community that need it most to face dangerous
17 condition in the school.

18 For --

19 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Thank you.

20 MR. WU: For affordable housing and --

21 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Sir, sir, I
22 need you to -- your time is up. Thank you.
23 Thank you for your testimony.

24 We appreciate you.

25 (Applause.)

1 MS. CLARK: Hello. My name is Christi
2 Clark. I work at the Women's Community
3 Revitalization Project. We are a developer that
4 also does community organizing. And we are here
5 to testify in support of Bill No. 190944, the
6 amendments to the tax abatement.

7 We are also part of the Philly Coalition
8 for Affordable Communities, a coalition of over
9 60 organizations from around the City. One
10 reason our coalition support this legislation is
11 because we stand with our allies in the Our City
12 Our Schools Coalition and the Alliance For a
13 Just Philadelphia because we know that healthy,
14 well-funded public schools impact all of us.
15 And the changes in this bill will create
16 additional resources for our schools. I will
17 also add that as a public school parent, it's
18 personal to me.

19 Additionally, the Philadelphia Coalition
20 For Affordable Communities has been working
21 since 2014 to win additional funding for the
22 Housing Trust Fund to expand affordable,
23 accessible housing. We support the proposed
24 changes in the tax abatement because we know
25 it's time for Philadelphia to address the harsh

1 impacts that development, specifically market
2 rate development has had on neighborhood
3 affordability. I'm talking about the
4 displacement that's effecting too many families,
5 specifically black and brown families, forcing
6 them to leave their communities.

7 We hope to see legislation introduced by
8 Council in the new year that would ensure a fair
9 portion of the money that starts coming back to
10 our City would support the preservation and
11 production of affordable and accessible homes.
12 Housing security is necessary to address
13 poverty. And for many Philadelphians, that
14 starts with having affordable accessible rental
15 housing or access to home repair or adaptive
16 modification grants to keep homeowners stably
17 housed.

18 With the new City revenue that will be
19 generated, hopefully starting in 2012, we are
20 asking you and Council to add money to the
21 Housing Trust Fund to expand the programs we
22 know work. We are asking folks to vote yes on
23 today's bill and to make a commitment to use the
24 revenue to come back to the City to further fund
25 our Housing Truth Fund.

1 Thank you.

2 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Thank you for
3 your testimony.

4 Next Boris Kaplan, Paul Steinke and Mark
5 Brown. Mark Brown? Mark here?

6 Boris is not here. Beth McConnell?
7 Walt is not here, right? Eileen Callaghan?

8 (Approaches Witness Table.)

9 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Calm down,
10 Paul. Everybody is anxious today. I know it's
11 late. Trust me.

12 You guys select who goes first.

13 MR. STEINKE: Okay. Well, thank you
14 Council President Clarke and Members of the
15 Committee of the Whole for your consideration of
16 my testimony today. My name is Paul Steinke.
17 And I'm Executive Director of the Preservation
18 Alliance for Greater Philadelphia. I am here to
19 testify on behalf of the alliance in support of
20 the tax abatement reform bill in front of the
21 committee today.

22 Despite a wealth of architectural
23 resources in the City, a collection on par with
24 or greater than any American City, we have had
25 few if any programs at the local level to

1 incentivize their maintenance and reuse. Lack
2 of incentives was a core focus of the Historic
3 Preservation Task Force.

4 While the impact of the tax abatement in
5 stimulating construction and development
6 activity over the past two decades is clear, the
7 tax abatement has also been a catalyst for the
8 destruction of historic buildings in pursuit of
9 larger, taller, denser and fully abated new
10 construction projects.

11 This bill by gradually scaling back the
12 abatement for new residential construction while
13 preserving it for rehabilitation projects, will
14 create a new incentive for historic preservation
15 in Philadelphia. This is something we haven't
16 had since the first version of the tax abatement
17 was enacted in 1997 when it was available solely
18 for rehabilitation projects.

19 The passage of this bill you are
20 considering today will once again give
21 rehabilitation priority. We believe this is how
22 it should be in a City in which around 70
23 percent of structures date from prior to 1940.
24 We must also remember that rehabilitation also
25 creates construction jobs and economic

1 development, which our City must continue to
2 foster and promote.

3 We have two other ideas that we think
4 are worthy of your consideration, each would
5 further incentive the rehabilitation of historic
6 buildings. One is zero-basis assessment, which
7 was a recommendation of Mayor Kenney's task
8 force on preservation. Which means for rehab
9 projects, the abatement should be applied for
10 the full improvement value, treating
11 rehabilitation as if it were new construction.

12 The second is demolition prohibition of
13 any building that's recognized on a -- on the
14 national register of historic places or as part
15 of a national historic district. In sum, the
16 Preservation Alliance supports the passage of
17 this bill. And we thank you for your
18 consideration.

19 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Thank you,
20 sir.

21 MS. CALLAGHAN: Evening, Council. My
22 name is Aileen Callaghan. I am the mother of a
23 six-year-old boy who is kindergartener at
24 Richmond School. I am a sitting committee
25 member of Reclaim Philadelphia. I am here to

1 stand in solidarity with the Our City Our
2 Schools Coalition.

3 During the last four months in my
4 community, I have knocked -- I have bottom lined
5 the operation to knock on 15,000 doors in my
6 neighborhoods. We had 2,000 conversations. And
7 99.9 percent of those individuals wanted a
8 complete and full end to the ten-year tax
9 abatement. So, that specifically is 1,990
10 people out of 2000 claim that they want a full
11 and complete end to the ten-year tax abatement.

12 Our community in the River Wards, which
13 is Poor Richmond, Kensington, Old Richmond,
14 Fishtown kind of, we are a stronger base of
15 stakeholders than eCon Consultants. We need to
16 begin to listen to our communities when we are
17 making choices. And I was very stressed to see,
18 like, the lack of transparency that was going on
19 in this process. We are very clear that the
20 reason why this legislation was put forward at
21 such haste today is because our communities have
22 been organizing directly to end the ten-year tax
23 abatement.

24 We will continue to fight this. Come
25 January, this is going to be the very first

1 step. And in this first step, we need to deeply
2 consider, this is not just a financial crisis
3 but a deep and real moral crisis in our
4 community. We are the poorest metropolis in the
5 nation. And the way that we organize money in
6 Philadelphia clearly shows who holds the power
7 in our. Those are the commercial real estate
8 developers. They sit in our elected offices.
9 They sit behind the closed doors in the
10 Democratic Caucus, and they weigh in our
11 legislation.

12 Specifically, BIA got their input on the
13 legislation when they decided to kill the bill
14 for the cap of homes exceeding \$400,000 before
15 this bill could get introduced on November 21.

16 We must consider our communities and the
17 impact this has on our schools. My son attends
18 Richmond School. There is asbestos in most of
19 the third grade classrooms. My son is not in a
20 safe environment, and he deserves that. On path
21 to end the ten-year tax abatement is the only
22 way to ensure that poor and working children in
23 Philadelphia are safe.

24 Thank you.

25 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Thank you.

1 (Applause.)

2 Thank you for your testimony

3 MS. ATKINSON: Good afternoon or now
4 evening, Council President and the rest of the
5 Members of City Council. My name is Heather
6 Atkinson. And I am a resident of Philadelphia.
7 I am a Democratic committee person, the mother
8 of a second grader, a former teacher, a Temple
9 graduate and a human being who believes we
10 should place more value on the well being of our
11 children than on the bank accounts of
12 developers.

13 Philadelphia has the money to address
14 the emergency that is plaguing our school
15 buildings. It's an emergency that is blamed for
16 endangering teachers and children and tragically
17 for dooming a life. What we need to save our
18 schools are the right priorities, and we need
19 the heroes to carry them out. This is your
20 chance to be a hero.

21 Until this year, my son attended
22 Meredith Elementary School whose teacher Leah
23 Deruso has been diagnosed with mesothelioma and
24 given one year to live. School District records
25 show that her classroom had a history of damaged

1 asbestos. It was marked high priority for
2 repair in 2015, 2016, 2017. But nothing was
3 done about it until she received her death
4 sentence. As you can imagine, this has caused
5 students and teachers to worry if they will be
6 next. Parents cannot sleep at night. Meredith
7 Elementary, a blue ribbon school, is not the
8 only school in Philadelphia that has been
9 endangering teachers and students. In fact,
10 this problem is rampant across our entire City.

11 How is it possible in the United States
12 of America that we cannot provide every child a
13 school that is free of toxic lead and asbestos?
14 We can, we should and we must. I live in a
15 neighborhood where there are million dollar
16 homes who have tax abatements. People are in
17 bidding wars paying over asking price. And we
18 tell the wealthiest of our citizens, hey, even
19 though our schools are making our children sick
20 and many who live in poverty cannot pay taxes,
21 you don't have to pay for ten years either. You
22 are literally robbing from our most vulnerable
23 citizens and giving the money to people who
24 don't need it. This must stop. This makes no
25 sense.

1 Meanwhile, the School District is in a
2 state of extreme emergency. And without the
3 funding to completely remediate all of the
4 effected schools, teachers and children will
5 remain in danger. Ultimately, the City will pay
6 both in lawsuits and by losing revenue when the
7 same people lured by tax abatements flee for
8 safe suburban schools.

9 Our leaders have failed our children and
10 their teachers. And I am calling on each of you
11 to be a hero. To step up, to do what it takes
12 to swiftly make our schools safe. The bill
13 being considered does not do enough to quickly
14 address the current crisis. In fact, students
15 in fourth grade or higher will have graduated
16 before it provides enough money to fix unsafe
17 schools.

18 Constituents across the City showed up
19 in record numbers to elect Kendra Brooks and
20 others who campaigned on ending the tax
21 abatement. Our citizens have made their voices
22 heard through rallies, call-ins, op eds,
23 lobbying and meetings. The people have spoken.
24 I knocked on my constituents doors, and I met
25 privately with some of you. Philadelphia

1 residents and many of you want to do more.

2 Please do more. We should not starve
3 our schools and neighborhoods to prioritize
4 developers. Please, get your priorities
5 straight. Be the heroes our City truly
6 deserves.

7 (Applause.)

8 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Thank you for
9 your testimony.

10 MS. MCCONNELL: Good evening, Council
11 President, other Members of Council.

12 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Evening.

13 MS. MCCONNELL: My name is Beth
14 McConnell, the Policy Director at the
15 Philadelphia Association of Community
16 Development Corporations, PACDC. We support
17 Bill No. 190944.

18 We do urge that Council amend the bill
19 to extend the effective date to the summer of
20 2021. This would give affordable housing
21 developers time to incorporate a modified
22 abatement schedule into their financing for
23 future projects. And allow us to not negatively
24 effect projects that currently awaiting awards
25 but that whose budget are not easily changed.

1 Otherwise, we firmly believe that tax
2 abatement reform is long overdue. It's
3 inequitable for Philadelphia taxpayers to
4 subsidize profitable market rate developer that
5 does not need subsidy and is benefiting
6 households that do not need help in securing
7 affordable homes.

8 We had asked Council to consider an
9 amendment that would continue the abatement for
10 affordable housing development, which is deed
11 restricted. Particularly, for rental
12 development to serve households between
13 20 percent and 60 percent area median income.
14 We do understand it's the position of the Law
15 Department that the Pennsylvania Constitution's
16 Uniformity Clause prevents us from doing that.
17 But we are still able to support this bill
18 without that amendment because we have been
19 assured by the Council President's office and by
20 the Kenney Administration that they will work
21 with affordable housing practitioners on each
22 project to make sure that low income housing tax
23 credit developments that do depend on the tax
24 abatement as a form of operating subsidy will
25 continue to be developed and supported and

1 subsidized in other ways.

2 We do estimate that a typical low income
3 housing tax credit project, the impact of
4 scaling back the abatement could be anywhere
5 from 42,000 to 50,000 dollars over a ten year
6 period based on the number of units and projects
7 that we develop each year. You know, that would
8 require some additional subsidies of about
9 \$390,000 a year to make these projects whole.
10 Those are resources that the City of
11 Philadelphia has. And we believe can be well
12 deployed and the abatement -- abatement reform
13 will still allow these projects to move forward.

14 In closing, want to applaud Council and
15 the Administration for working to boost
16 investment in the Housing Trust Fund so
17 significantly. And we do hope that out of the
18 abatement reform, additional resources that are
19 due to the City could go to support and develop
20 more affordable homes.

21 Thank you for the opportunity to
22 testify.

23 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Thank you.
24 And thank you so much for your great work you
25 guys do. Really appreciate your focus on

1 affordability in the City of Philadelphia.

2 MS. MCCONNELL: Thank you.

3 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Next up we
4 have Dawn Ly, Antoine Little, Lena Smith.

5 (Approaches Witness Table.)

6 MR. LY: Good evening. My name is Yung
7 Ly, Youth Project Director at Viet Lead and also
8 homeowner. I'm here to talk about structural
9 violence that are students are going through
10 every day to school, as someone working with
11 high school students and also as a product of
12 public school system in Philly.

13 Throughout my three years going there,
14 my friends and I experienced racial harassment
15 from others in hostile environments so
16 normalized that no adult did anything to change
17 it. On December 3, 2009, exactly two days ten
18 years ago, things came to a tipping point where
19 over 30 Asian immigrant students were beaten up
20 over the course of one school day, while the
21 school and School District, of course, did
22 nothing.

23 This time, there are over 750 other
24 students came together with supports to demand
25 accountability, identify root causes of the

1 problems which we saw as the SRC at the time and
2 school District who let it happen through
3 normalization of and participation in structural
4 violence. Underfunded schools and under-paid
5 staff and lack of clear directions and
6 leadership from School District on ensuring
7 safety for all students. And today on the tenth
8 anniversary of what happened, I am speaking in
9 front of you to once again highlight systemic
10 violence that are public school students and
11 staff have to go through.

12 One has been ignored for far too long,
13 but one that we totally have the power to change
14 right now. From almost two years, the Lead has
15 worked with students from Furness and other
16 under-funded schools across the City to fight
17 for additional resources to fix crumbling school
18 conditions like lead and asbestos. We also
19 joined a coalition of organizations working
20 across issues involving land, schools and
21 housing to collectively demand an end to the
22 ten-year tax abatement, which we know is a
23 common element to detriment to black, brown and
24 working class communities are facing.

25 For over 20 years, this generous tax

1 break has accelerated the loss of black and
2 brown community farms and gardens, stolen
3 millions of dollars from public schools and
4 replaced truly affordable housing with condos.
5 This structural systemic violence aiming at the
6 most marginalized of the City.

7 Thanks to the organizing efforts from
8 many organizations the past three years, today
9 we finally have a chance to do something right
10 by passing the amendments to the ten-year tax
11 abatement, which we still think is really
12 inadequate and was introduced behind closed
13 doors without people's feedback.

14 We know City Council has looked to the
15 wealthy BIA who benefits most from tax abatement
16 as a major force behind any decision on it. And
17 even with such modest changes to the abatement
18 from which we won't see any impact until 2021,
19 BIA is once again using the political and
20 capital powers to pressure the City Council for
21 strip-down amendments.

22 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Thank you.

23 MR. LY: Why do we continue to normalize
24 the structural violence and prioritize the
25 growth of the wealthy over land security,

1 healthy schools and affordable housing for
2 working class.

3 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Thank you.

4 MR. LY: And I am going to finish my
5 statement.

6 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Please.

7 MR. LY: With that in mind, on behalf of
8 students I work with, I am here to demand the
9 following.

10 One, pass the amendments to tax
11 abatement right now and ask this without
12 stripping it down any further as suggested by
13 the BIA. But know that we will continue to
14 fight to end it.

15 Two, create a democratic process for
16 radicle inclusion of the communities most
17 impacted in this matter, including the processes
18 of reviewing the impacts of abatement on our
19 communities.

20 And three, create an emergency fund to
21 address the crumbling infrastructure of Philly
22 public schools and pressure the School District
23 to set aside any additional funding to issue.

24 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Thank you.

25 MR. LY: Ten years ago we had a saying,

1 we had the power to make change. And we did.
2 We will continue to fight moving forward to end
3 the tax abatement, get back the resources we
4 deserve.

5 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: All right,
6 sir.

7 MR. LY: To make the city for all of us
8 and not just the wealthy.

9 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Okay. This
10 what you can do --

11 MR. LY: Thank you. Because you give
12 the developer 30 minutes to speak.

13 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: That's cool.
14 If anybody wants to leave their testimony, we
15 will make sure that it gets in the record. So,
16 we can leave and make sure it's in entirety.

17 MS. SMITH: Good evening. Thank you,
18 Councilman Clarke and this body for the
19 opportunity to speak. My name is Lena Smith.
20 I'm a campaign manager for clean water advocacy
21 at PennFuture. I'm projecting a little bit of a
22 different dialogue into this debate.

23 PennFuture is leading the transition
24 into clean energy economy in Pennsylvania and
25 beyond. We are protecting our air, water and

1 land and empowering citizens to build
2 sustainable community for future generations.
3 PennFuture supports this first step to amend the
4 ten-year tax abatement. However, we believe
5 there is still work that needs to happen. These
6 initial changes being discussed are just the
7 start of an ongoing debate that we look forward
8 to participating in with the incoming elected
9 City Councilmembers.

10 While we know that now is not the time,
11 in the future, City Council should prioritize
12 abatements for improvements that advance the
13 City's green stormwater infrastructure and
14 climate change goals. I would like to commend
15 this body, and particularly Councilperson's
16 Reynolds Brown and Green for the work that has
17 gone into incentivizing development and
18 addressing the reality of the climate crisis and
19 contribute to greening our City.

20 At a time when global temperatures are
21 increasing and we see an increase in storms,
22 flooding and climate disasters, Philadelphia
23 must take all measures to advance emissions
24 reduction and climate resiliency and adaptation
25 measures. Green City Clean Waters is one of

1 those programs that is building green stormwater
2 infrastructure to address the City's combines
3 for overflows and creates multiple community
4 benefits for green jobs, green space, increasing
5 safety and addressing climate adaptation and
6 resiliency.

7 The City is required to manage runoff
8 from 9,564 acres from across the City's combined
9 sewer area. Side development on private
10 property which offers huge opportunities to
11 create cost effective greened acres is essential
12 to achieving Green City Clean Water's goals.

13 In the first five years, Greened Acres
14 as a result of private or public private
15 investment accounted for 1,154 greened acres,
16 almost 80 percent of the total 1,450 green acres
17 achieved. These goals allowed the City to
18 accomplish their greened acres goals under the
19 consent order under a cheaper price than it
20 would have cost the Water Department to build
21 equivalent projects on public property.

22 From the beginning, PWD understood the
23 necessity for the private investment for the
24 program to succeed and encourage private
25 investment. But barriers to maximizing this

1 investment persists. The City can rely on
2 development incentives like a tax abatement
3 program to expand incentives already in place
4 and accelerate the implementation of GSI and
5 public/private property. If Philadelphia is to
6 continue with tax abatements, the City must
7 prioritize properties that advance the City's
8 green stormwater infrastructure and climate
9 change goals.

10 Thank you.

11 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Thank you.

12 Thank you for your testimony.

13 MR. LITTLE: Good evening.

14 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Good evening.

15 MR. LITTLE: I first want to start off
16 by saying -- I'm sorry. Antoine Little. I
17 apologize.

18 I want to start off by first thanking
19 Councilwoman Gym, Councilwoman Bass,
20 Councilwoman Blackwell for standing with the
21 children and partners of TM Peirce Elementary
22 School as we stood up against the District with
23 this horrific situation that's going on not just
24 at TM Peirce, but with all these Philadelphia
25 public schools. You know, we heard from the

1 developers. We've heard the activists. We have
2 heard from some parents. And one of the things
3 that I was taught early on when I began in my
4 union career, I was told that no matter what
5 argument you make, you should always be able to
6 put a human side to every argument.

7 We can sit here, we can talk about
8 dollars, we can talk about cents, but let's talk
9 about the human side. This is the human side.

10 Last year, at TM Peirce Elementary
11 School, my son was burnt by faulty electrical
12 outlet in the school. Received a dime-sized
13 burn on his rear end. Let's talk about the
14 human side. TM Peirce, Pratt Arnold, LP Hill,
15 Meredith, SLA, Benjamin Franklin and countless
16 other schools have asbestos in these schools
17 that our children attend on a daily basis.

18 Let's talk about the human side. Let's
19 talk about the teacher from Meredith who
20 contracted cancer while working in the school.
21 The human side. Let's talk about a staff person
22 at TM Peirce who just recently retired after
23 having 30-plus years of service with the School
24 District who is in TM Peirce her entire career
25 who does not know if she will come down with

1 some type of cancerous disease.

2 So when we talk about the human side to
3 things, we are going to have a conversation and
4 say the abatement must end. And why do I say
5 that? You said something early on Councilman,
6 Council President, excuse me, in your remarks
7 earlier. You said, there are a lot of people
8 who want more done, not just this version of the
9 bill. I am one of them.

10 The abatement must end. And why does
11 the abatement must end? Because at some
12 point -- this is the human side. At some point,
13 every child that's in that District will either
14 be sitting in these chairs or be somewhere as an
15 adult. And we will be long gone. And they may
16 possibly contract something that none of us will
17 be able to explain to them. And then what do we
18 do? We say we don't know.

19 So what do we do? If we end the
20 ten-year tax abatement, that -- those millions
21 and millions of dollars that are not going into
22 the School District will go into the District,
23 Dr. Hite said that it will cost \$50 million to
24 go in every school and abate it from lead and
25 asbestos. \$50 million. How much money are we

1 losing annually to the abatement?

2 TM Peirce and one other school will now
3 receive new schools. They will now receive new
4 schools. But why can't all the schools be
5 rehabbed? Why can't all of the schools, the
6 ones especially like TM Peirce that was built in
7 1909 be torn down right and rebuilt. I
8 understand it's, you know, the money is not
9 there.

10 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: All right.

11 MR. LITTLE: But it is there. When
12 those developers are walking away with their
13 pockets full of money, my three children that
14 attend TM Peirce and every other child in this
15 District are suffering.

16 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: All right.

17 MR. LITTLE: They are suffering. I'm
18 going to end with this. A system cannot fail
19 those it was never meant to protect. WEB
20 Dubois. This is a body of people who are
21 responsible for taking care of the men and women
22 and the children of the City of Philadelphia.
23 This afternoon, I charge every person in this
24 room to do the right thing and stand up for our
25 children, stand up for our children, and end the

1 ten-year tax abatement.

2 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Thank you.

3 MR. LITTLE: Thank you.

4 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Thank you for
5 your testimony, sir.

6 Next up we have the new list. Robin
7 Lipp, David -- having trouble with this
8 handwriting. David Moscatello, and Lynn
9 Robinson.

10 (Approaches Witness Table.)

11 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Sir, your
12 name?

13 MR. LIPP: Robin Lipp.

14 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Your Robin
15 Lipp. We need David Moscatell. David here?
16 David's not here. Lena Robinson? Lena is not
17 here. Barbara Caposi. I saw Barbara earlier.
18 There she is. Jihad Ali. I saw Jihad. There
19 is Jihad.

20 (Approaches Witness Table.)

21 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Good evening.

22 MR. LIPP: Good evening. Thank you. My
23 name is Robin Lipp. I was a volunteer canvasser
24 for Councilmember-Elect Kendra Brooks in the
25 River Wards where I live. When I was out

1 knocking on over a hundred doors, the tax
2 abatement was the issue that energized voters.
3 Kendra Brooks campaigned and won on repealing
4 the abatement now.

5 I would urge the members of Council to
6 respect the democratic and the results of that
7 election and to take action on this issue when
8 the new Councilmembers can be here to
9 participate fully in discussions and cast their
10 votes.

11 I also happen to have a Masters degree
12 in Public Policy from the Harvard Policy School
13 of Government. In preparation for today, I
14 reviewed the reports that are publicly available
15 online about the affects of the ten-year tax
16 abatement. I saw only very weak evidence about
17 how much development in this City has been
18 caused by the abatement that would not have
19 occurred without it, what the public benefits of
20 any such development have been, and how those
21 benefits have been distributed by income and by
22 race.

23 I would just point out that development
24 is not an end in itself. And the public ought
25 to know the costs and benefit of the abatement

1 if you choose this path. I do urge the members
2 of the Council to support independent impact
3 evaluations that consider distributive issues so
4 that the public can understand what the policy
5 does, who benefits and who loses.

6 Thank you.

7 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Thank you for
8 your testimony.

9 MS. CAPOSI: Hi. My name is Barbara
10 Caposi. I really couldn't even begin to
11 summarize the false narratives that have taken
12 place today. And whoever is really responsible
13 for blaming the ten-year tax abatement for all
14 the City's ills is just remarkable to me that
15 anybody would -- could even begin to believe
16 that.

17 I would like the ability to submit my
18 testimony in writing. Because --

19 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Sure.

20 MS. CAPOSI: -- it was in detail and was
21 coherent and did make sense. But after sitting
22 here all day and hearing that the ten-year tax
23 abatement is responsible for the poverty in this
24 City, the disgraceful condition of the School
25 District, which has been that way since the

1 buildings were built, okay, and were they --
2 were the schools the paragons of virtue 20
3 years -- when the ten-year tax abatement wasn't
4 here? No, they were not. And guarantee you
5 today, if the ten-year tax abatement ended
6 tomorrow, the School District would not improve.

7 I think we all need to put our energy
8 into seeing what the School District does for
9 the \$2.7 billion that they get a year, almost
10 \$3 billion plus all the money they get from the
11 dozens of advocacy groups, like the Giving
12 Circle, the Donors Choose, the Philadelphia
13 Foundation and all those other people like
14 myself that contribute to the School District
15 for projects for teachers, supplies for kids, et
16 cetera, et cetera. So, to equate the ten-year
17 tax abatement with the conditions of the School
18 District is really an easy, easy fix.

19 It's so untrue. There is -- I couldn't
20 even begin to tell you the ways that's it's not
21 true. And anybody that has pushed this false
22 narrative is going to be exposed. Because when
23 the ten-year tax abatement ends or whatever way
24 you choose to change that, the City -- the
25 School District will not improve. I can almost

1 guarantee that. Nobody has to read the studies.
2 I am sure nobody has. There is tons of studies.
3 Let's just use common sense.

4 The law of supply and demand. The more
5 you have of something, the lower the price is.
6 The more options you have, the more choices you
7 have, the bigger the supply, the less the price.
8 If we are concerned about affordable housing, it
9 makes no sense to stop the vehicle that has
10 contributed to the additional units that are in
11 the City. The more units that are here, the
12 more affordable the units are. The more options
13 people have, the more people move back from New
14 Jersey, the more people that are here that do
15 have options can stay because they can find
16 something new and then someone can move into
17 their home. So, the more houses you have, the
18 lower the price. That's what we all want.

19 The Mayor's Housing Advisory Board which
20 I am on and had 10,000, meetings, has a goal of
21 hundred thousand new units within the next ten
22 years. How the hell is that going to happen
23 without a ten-year tax abatement? It's not.
24 And the reason that the Housing Advisory Board
25 wanted all those new additional units was to

1 keep the prices down. Philadelphia is actually
2 affordable. The ten-year tax abatement has
3 taken the brunt of OPA, which is a disgrace.
4 They are using computers that I threw out 20
5 years ago. I mean, it's a disgrace. In this
6 day and age, it's very simple to find the value
7 of a home. It's very simple.

8 I do agree that the Homestead Exemption
9 should be increased because it's one vehicle
10 that will soften the blow of the unequal
11 assessments. As the community leader in my
12 neighborhood for 30 years, I must have filled
13 out hundreds of Homestead Exemptions. And the
14 taxpayers do appreciate Council for coming up
15 with that simple one form, one-page form to help
16 them pay their taxes. All neighborhoods need
17 that.

18 But I would like the opportunity to
19 submit written comments. But again, it's a very
20 false narrative to blame the ten-year tax
21 abatement and rich developers who take huge
22 risks for the poverty in the City and the
23 condition of the School District. I would like
24 to ask them what they do with their three
25 billion dollars a year. I would.

1 MR. JIHAD: Good afternoon, Council.
2 It's always a pleasure to see you. As I always
3 say when I see you, it's a blessing from God for
4 me to see you today. My name is Jihad Ali. And
5 I'm from Southwest Philadelphia District
6 Services.

7 And for the record, I would like to say
8 I support this bill. And I just want to make
9 one comment. This bill, people -- we come down
10 to this center, we all play different roles.
11 You are elected officials sitting along the
12 side. We the citizens on this side. We come to
13 give our opinion. And we all are entitled to
14 our opinion. But we are not all entitled to a
15 different set of facts.

16 As a young man from Harvard pointed out,
17 where are the studies. I'm old enough to
18 remember when the tax abatement first started.
19 And I remember them saying that the issue was
20 going to be -- was going to create jobs. The
21 construction job, the increase in business
22 revenue tax and all that. But what they didn't
23 see -- we are talking about the residential
24 part. What they didn't see was all the
25 residential contractors that come in from out of

1 town. We don't get any benefit from that.

2 You cannot talk about real estate
3 development -- my -- some of these speakers that
4 come, they're young people. You cannot talk
5 about real estate development without looking at
6 the racial aspect of zoning and development that
7 began in 19th Century.

8 In fact, in 1919 when this whole
9 movement started when the FHA was put in
10 existence, that was in 1934. And in 1934, that
11 was authorized by President Roosevelt, and
12 President Roosevelt authorized FHA to ensure
13 home loans so we can have mortgages. And the
14 homeownership would become part of the American
15 dream. But that was part of the American dream
16 for everybody except who in 1934 do you think
17 that was? That was black people and people of
18 color.

19 So 1934, this is -- this is fact of law.
20 This is not conjecture. The is something that's
21 referred to as de facto de juris segregation.
22 Meaning, it's a part of legalized segregation to
23 segregate -- I'm just looking at you. I'm
24 sorry. I guess because you said it was a false
25 narrative.

1 MS. CAPOSI: It is a false narrative.

2 MR. JIHAD: So, I guess -- it's not
3 false because I'm just presenting you with facts
4 and you are talking about opinion. But at the
5 end of the day, I think Council is doing the
6 right thing. Council, at the end of the day,
7 this -- history is going forward. We can look
8 20 years into the future and see what the
9 decision was made. But when we look at
10 development, the things they talk about,
11 employment, when we look at the residential
12 development, we didn't see that.

13 I am in the construction field. We
14 don't see that. We don't see jobs. We talk
15 about the affordability of homes, a \$400,000
16 home could be \$2,000 a month. We don't see
17 that. The only affordable housing that we see
18 is housing that this Council, Council President
19 and them, enacted by assisting first-time
20 homeowners with \$10,000. That's the affordable
21 part. The rest of this stuff is all
22 misdirection.

23 Because the facts -- where are the
24 reports to support everything that they are
25 saying. We just can't come down anecdotally

1 when you guys are making these decisions, you
2 need facts. And you are on the right side of
3 history going forward. This has to end. This
4 is just a few developers. The real prominent
5 developers, they knew it had to end sooner or
6 later. Nothing goes on forever.

7 I think going forward, I think Council
8 is doing the right thing. I support whatever
9 this Council comes up with. I support the
10 people who authorized this bill because it's
11 moving in the right direction.

12 Thank you.

13 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Thank you.

14 (Applause.)

15 Thank you for your testimony.

16 Appreciate you. I believe that concludes the
17 witness list. Is there anyone else to testify?

18 Please, sir, come forward.

19 (Approaches Witness Table.)

20 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:

21 MR. MUNCH: Good evening,
22 Councilmembers. Thanks for waiting through a
23 long meeting. I think the importance of this
24 subject matter deserves it. My name is Aaron
25 Munch, and I'm speaking on behalf of Repoint

1 Philadelphia, a historic advocacy group in the
2 City.

3 Demolition in the City of Philadelphia
4 is at an all time high. The recent Historic
5 Preservation Task Force Report explains how the
6 current tax abatement financially incentivizes
7 demolition of existing structures in favor of
8 new construction. This may not be the intent,
9 but it is the effect. Any proposed amendment to
10 the abatement that fails to directly address
11 this problem in our so-called world heritage
12 City is inadequate. Not only does the
13 incentivized demolition destroy buildings and
14 sites that make up our -- that make our City
15 distinctive, it also undermines the
16 neighborhoods and residents of this town. It
17 undermines the very identity of these places.

18 It also undermines neighborhood safety
19 and the problem stemming from the demolition of
20 adjacent structure are on the rise and
21 increasingly well documented. The tax abatement
22 has loomed over Philadelphia for years as a
23 source of controversy and discontent. Now as we
24 await the January arrival of newly elected
25 members in this legislative body, members who

1 carry with them a voter's mandate to end or
2 amend the abatement, Council has opted to
3 advance a hastily formulated measure to address
4 these concerns.

5 Why now? A skeptic might see here an
6 effort to end debate on the issue before the
7 incoming cohort has had a chance to weigh in.
8 However, assuming the most public spirited
9 motives are in play, we can infer the bill
10 sponsors believe they are taking an important
11 first step toward reforming an outmoded law.
12 That idea sounds reasonable, but it is
13 misguided. If this bill passes, City Council
14 will have given way its near term ability to
15 modify the abatement in a more substantive and
16 democratic manner.

17 Repoint Philadelphia respectfully
18 requests that Councilmembers vote no on the
19 current bill. Any amendment to the abatement
20 must thoroughly consider the abatement's impact
21 on our City's historic neighborhood and sites
22 along with key considerations such as school
23 funding, the labor market and environmental and
24 community impact. The abatement we have now
25 subsidizes developers and wealth newcomers at

1 the expense of long term residents. Any fix
2 worth enacting must go farther towards solving
3 these problems. Any reform worth pursuing must
4 level the playing field for rehab and reuse of
5 the existing building stock, which is often
6 better built, better looking and even more
7 sustainable than new construction.

8 Thank you for your time.

9 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Thank you
10 very much for your testimony. That, I believe,
11 now concludes the witness list. We will take a
12 ten-minute break. And we will be right back to
13 continue with the Public Meeting.

14 - - -

15 (Public Hearing adjourned.)

16 - - -

17 (Public Meeting commenced.)

18 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: We are going
19 to get started. Thank you. Thank you all for
20 your patience. We are back from our
21 break/recess in our Public Hearing. We will now
22 go into our Public Meeting.

23 And the chair recognizes Councilmember
24 Johnson for a motion on Bill No. 190943.

25 COUNCILMAN JOHNSON: Thank you, Council

1 President. I move that Bill No. 190943 be
2 reported from this Committee with a favorable
3 recommendation, that the Rules of Council be
4 suspended so as to permit consideration of this
5 bill at our next session of Council.

6 (Duly seconded.)

7 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Thank you.
8 All those in favor of the motion will signify by
9 saying aye. It's been a long day. I'm sorry.

10 Signify by saying aye.

11 (Ayes.)

12 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Those
13 opposed?

14 (No opposition.)

15 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Ayes have it.
16 And this Bill No. 190943 will be reported from
17 this Committee with a favorable recommendation
18 and suspension of the rules so as to permit
19 consideration of this bill at our next session
20 of Council.

21 Chair now recognizes Councilmember Bass
22 for a motion on Bill No. 190944.

23 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Thank you,
24 Mr. President. I move that Bill No. 190944 be
25 reported from this Committee with a favorable

1 recommendation. And that the Rules of Council
2 be suspended so as to permit consideration of
3 this bill at our next session of Council.

4 (Duly seconded.)

5 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Thank you.

6 All those in favor of the motion will
7 signify by saying aye.

8 (Ayes.)

9 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Those
10 opposed?

11 (No opposition.)

12 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Ayes have it.
13 And Bill No. 190944 will be reported from this
14 Committee with a favorable recommendation, and a
15 suspension of the rules so as to permit
16 consideration of the bill at our next session of
17 Council.

18 This concludes the business of the
19 Committee. And I thank you all very much.

20 (Public Meeting of the Committee of the
21 Whole concluded at 7:01 p.m.)

C E R T I F I C A T I O N

I, hereby certify that the proceedings and evidence noted are contained fully and accurately in the stenographic notes taken by me in the foregoing matter, and that this is a correct transcript of the same.

ANGELA M. KING, RPR,
Court Reporter, Notary Public

(The foregoing certification of this transcript does not apply to any reproduction of the same by any means, unless under the direct control and/or supervision of the certifying reporter.)

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