

Joint Committees on Legislative Oversight

COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA
JOINT COMMITTEES ON LEGISLATIVE OVERSIGHT
AND PARKS AND RECREATION

Room 400, City Hall
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Friday, May 1, 2026
11:06 a.m.

PRESENT:

COUNCILMAN ANTHONY PHILLIPS, CHAIR
COUNCILWOMAN RUE LANDAU, VICE-CHAIR
COUNCILWOMAN KENDRA BROOKS
COUNCILMAN JIM HARRITY
COUNCILMAN MARK SQUILLA
COUNCILMAN JEFFREY YOUNG, JR.

RESOLUTION: 251083

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2 COUNCILWOMAN LANDAU:

3 Good morning, everyone. Thank you
4 so much for your patience and
5 welcome to Philadelphia City
6 Council's Committees on Legislative
7 Oversight and Parks, Recreation and
8 Cultural Affairs. I note that the
9 hour has come.

10 Ms. Easley, will you
11 please call the roll.

12 THE CLERK:
13 Councilmember Jones.

14 (No response.)

15 THE CLERK:
16 Councilmember Lozada.

17 (No response.)

18 THE CLERK:
19 Councilmember Squilla.

20 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA:
21 Present.

22 THE CLERK:
23 Councilmember Young.

24 COUNCILMAN YOUNG:

1 Present.

2 THE CLERK: Vice-Chair

3 Bass.

4 (No response.)

5 THE CLERK: Chair

6 Phillips.

7 COUNCILMAN PHILLIPS:

8 Present.

9 THE CLERK: Vice-Chair

10 Landau.

11 COUNCILWOMAN LANDAU:

12 Present.

13 THE CLERK: Chair

14 Thomas.

15 (No response.)

16 THE CLERK:

17 Councilmember Harrity.

18 COUNCILMAN HARRITY:

19 Present.

20 THE CLERK:

21 Councilmember Brooks.

22 COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS:

23 Present.

24 COUNCILWOMAN LANDAU:

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1 Thank you, Ms. Easley. I note for
2 the record that a quorum of this
3 committee is present and this
4 hearing is called to order. This
5 is a public hearing of the
6 Committees of Legislative Oversight
7 in Parks, Recreation and Cultural
8 Affairs, considering testimony on
9 Resolution No. 251083.

10 I have a few opening
11 remarks and then I will pass it
12 along to the colleagues today.
13 Before I get started, I have to say
14 that the stenographer needs to
15 leave at 1 o'clock so we're going
16 to try the best we can to stay on
17 schedule even though I know that we
18 started a little bit late.

19 Today is an opportunity
20 for all of us to take a closer look
21 at one of the most important
22 resources our city offers
23 Philadelphians. Our public
24 libraries are among our most

1 democratic institutions, places
2 where knowledge is free, where
3 opportunity is shared and where
4 every individual, no matter their
5 zip code, should be able to walk
6 through the doors and access
7 resources that enrich their lives
8 and level the playing field.

9 But as anyone who has
10 recently visited their local
11 library knows, many of our
12 libraries face serious challenges,
13 things like aging infrastructure,
14 staffing shortages, outdated
15 technology, inequitable access by
16 geography, inconsistent hours and
17 so much more. Today we will hear
18 right from the source, directly
19 from librarians, staff, visitors,
20 and advocates.

21 We need to know what
22 barriers they are facing, what
23 support do library workers need,
24 what should the library of the

1 future look like in Philadelphia,
2 how can we ensure that every branch
3 is equipped to serve as a modern,
4 inclusive, and accessible community
5 space. These questions don't just
6 come from us. They come from the
7 workers who are keeping these
8 systems afloat every day.

9 We know that it takes a
10 lot of work and community
11 involvement to keep a library
12 running efficiently. How can we
13 improve processes and protocols for
14 the people who have dedicated
15 themselves to this public service.
16 Today I hope to hear from the
17 public about their needs
18 surrounding digital literacy,
19 workforce development, internet
20 implementation and social services.

21 These are hubs for
22 people to learn new skills, connect
23 with others and access critical
24 resources. We need to make sure

1 that those who need it most are
2 able to find, explore and use this
3 critical infrastructure. I look
4 forward to today's conversation and
5 to having some of these questions
6 answered and some ideas for the
7 future of libraries in
8 Philadelphia. Thank you.

9 Do any other committee
10 members have opening remarks,
11 including the sponsor of the
12 resolution?

13 COUNCILMAN PHILLIPS:
14 Thank you. So I just want to say
15 thank you all for being here today.
16 I believe Kelly Richards has been
17 doing his best to be transformative
18 with the City of Philadelphia
19 libraries, as our Mayor would say,
20 doing the best with what he has and
21 often times has to encounter. And
22 so, we're looking forward to
23 hearing a great vision on how we
24 could be supportive of Kelly and

1 the foundation to make the
2 libraries better.

3 And I also want to thank
4 our 47 union, who's been echoing
5 this for many, many years, long
6 before me. And so, hopefully this
7 Council body can work together.
8 And I do want to thank the sponsor
9 of the bill, Jeff Young, who's been
10 sounding off on the importance of
11 libraries as much as possible, but
12 we definitely need to invest in our
13 libraries and our parks and recs as
14 much as possible.

15 Thank you, Chairperson
16 Landau, for your support too
17 because the city doesn't do as much
18 investment in our parks and recs
19 and libraries in a way that other
20 cities do and we need to find ways
21 to create that investment as much
22 as possible. And I sincerely,
23 sincerely believe in reallocations
24 to make sure that that happens.

1 Thank you.

2 COUNCILWOMAN LANDAU:

3 Thank you, Councilmember Phillips,
4 who I also want to say is the Chair
5 of the Parks & Rec Committee.

6 And now, I recognize
7 Councilmember Jay Young, who is the
8 sponsor of the resolution.

9 COUNCILMAN YOUNG: Thank
10 you, Madam Chair and Councilmember
11 Phillips, Chair of Parks & Rec
12 Committee. Thank you so much for
13 allowing me to have this hearing
14 today. So I want to say good
15 morning to members of the public.
16 Thank you all for being here for
17 this critical hearing, your taking
18 the time out and we really
19 appreciate it.

20 All the advocates, the
21 librarians, the educators, the
22 neighbors who showed up not just to
23 observe but to speak, right, to
24 speak to your city government, to

1 tell us what your issues and what
2 your concerns are. Your presence
3 underscores something that's very
4 important, that libraries are not
5 abstract institutions. They are
6 lived spaces, they're community
7 anchors and they deeply matter to
8 the people that we serve.

9 I introduced Resolution
10 251083 to authorize this
11 investigatory hearing because we
12 owe the City of Philadelphia. We
13 owe the people in the City of
14 Philadelphia clear answers about
15 the current conditions of our
16 libraries and the future of our
17 library system. And at a moment
18 when much is being asked of our
19 libraries, we have a responsibility
20 to take a hard, honest look at
21 whether we are equipping them to
22 meet that demand.

23 This is about
24 accountability, but it's also about

1 vision. What should a 21st century
2 library look like in a city like
3 ours and what will it take to get
4 us there. I want to acknowledge
5 panelists who've joined us today.
6 Many have dedicated their careers
7 to expanding literacy access
8 opportunity, not just in the 5th
9 District, but across the City of
10 Philadelphia. You're on the front
11 lines of this work every day and
12 your expertise will help ground
13 this conversation into reality, not
14 rhetoric.

15 I also want to recognize
16 the constituents from my district
17 who are here and prepared to
18 testify. Your voices are essential
19 to this process and I thank you for
20 your advocacy. We are having this
21 hearing at a critical time when
22 Philadelphia is facing a literacy
23 crisis. 71% of our 4th graders
24 aren't proficient. That's a fact,

1 right. And almost 40% of adults
2 still struggle to fill out job
3 applications, read doctors'
4 instructions and help children with
5 their homework.

6 These are not stats.
7 They are warning signs about the
8 future of our city. And just last
9 night, our school district moved
10 forward with a decision to close 17
11 schools without fully answering the
12 most basic question about how those
13 decisions were made, how
14 communities would be supported. In
15 the 5th District alone, we lost
16 Waring, Robert Morris and Penn
17 Treaty.

18 Waring is one of the
19 many schools that had a library in
20 it, right, volunteer-run library,
21 because our school district only
22 has what, three librarians for the
23 490,000 students. It's moments
24 like this when libraries are a

1 necessity. There are places where
2 young people can continue to learn,
3 where families can access resources
4 and where communities can find
5 stability in disruption. And we
6 have in this conversation in the
7 middle of our budget hearing, and
8 we know our libraries are
9 underresourced, as my colleagues
10 mentioned. We know there are
11 critical gaps in staffing and hours
12 and programming.

13 The Mayor's budget does
14 take an important step with
15 investments in HVAC. I want to
16 acknowledge that. This is just
17 deferred maintenance that should
18 have been happened though, should
19 have been happened 30 years ago.
20 So it really doesn't meaningfully
21 address what happens inside of
22 those library buildings, right,
23 with expanded hours for working
24 families, enough staff to meet the

1 demand, the program and the
2 literacy. Communities are asking
3 for these things. They're asking
4 for space.

5 And at the moment we're
6 closing schools and (inaudible)
7 literacy. Standing still is not an
8 option. In the 5th Council
9 District, we've already taken those
10 steps, specifically with the Cecil
11 B. Moore Library. We've secured
12 additional funding for that
13 library. We've made investments in
14 the infrastructure, including the
15 HVAC, but we also hear the
16 community clearly, that the vision
17 for Cecil B. Moore Library goes
18 beyond just repair.

19 Residents are asking for
20 expanded programming, flexible
21 spaces and a library that reflects
22 the full potential of a
23 neighborhood. And the reality is
24 that that vision may not fit into a

1 current footprint of a building.
2 That's why we're building a Cecil
3 B. Moore Advisory Group to ensure
4 that the next phase of this work is
5 shaped directly by the people who
6 will use and rely on that library
7 every day, because getting this
8 right means investing with
9 intention, with transparency and
10 with community at the table.

11 So today's hearing is an
12 opportunity to take stock of where
13 we are as a city and be honest
14 about what will it take to move us
15 forward, move us in the right
16 direction because we see what our
17 future is 70% not reading. I can't
18 sit with that on my heart. The
19 question before us is not whether
20 libraries matter. The question is
21 whether our investment reflects the
22 reality. I look forward to
23 thoughtful and direct conversation.
24 And thank you all for being a part

1 of it.

2 COUNCILWOMAN LANDAU:

3 Thank you so much for your words.

4 Ms. Easley, would you
5 please read the title of the
6 resolution.

7 THE CLERK: Resolution
8 No. 251083, authorizing the Council
9 Committees on Legislative Oversight
10 and Parks, Recreation and Cultural
11 Affairs to hold hearings to
12 investigate the current conditions
13 and future of Philadelphia's public
14 libraries.

15 COUNCILWOMAN LANDAU:

16 And the Clerk will please call the
17 first panel to testify on this
18 resolution.

19 THE CLERK: Kelly
20 Richards, President and Director of
21 the Free Library of Philadelphia.

22 (Witnesses approached
23 witness table.)

24 COUNCILWOMAN LANDAU:

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1 Good morning, President Richards.
2 Please state your name for the
3 record and proceed with your
4 testimony and tell us who's with
5 you.

6 MR. RICHARDS: Good
7 morning. Thank you, Councilwoman.
8 I'm here with Aparna and Ty, who is
9 my Deputy Director of Property
10 Management. So good morning --
11 actually good afternoon,
12 Chairpersons Thomas and Phillips --
13 oh, it's still morning. Okay --
14 and members of the committees.

15 Thank you for the
16 opportunity to testify today on
17 Resolution No. 251083 introduced by
18 Councilmember Young, concerning the
19 future of Philadelphia's public
20 libraries. I'm Kelly Richards,
21 President and Director of the Free
22 Library of Philadelphia. I want to
23 begin with some of the language
24 from the resolution.

1 Libraries are essential
2 civic infrastructure. As the
3 resolution notes, our libraries are
4 safe, accessible and free. Our 54
5 neighborhood libraries are hubs
6 that connect residents with new
7 opportunities and improve lives
8 across every neighborhood of
9 Philadelphia. That is not
10 aspirational. It is the reality we
11 see every day.

12 In the Free Library
13 today, we are actively planning and
14 investing in the future we all want
15 to see, a robust, modern future for
16 our system that aligns with global
17 best practices and responds
18 directly to the needs and wishes of
19 Philadelphia's neighborhoods. We
20 want to bring together the best
21 ideas, and often those come
22 directly from our community
23 stakeholders.

24 Philadelphia is changing

1 economically, technologically and
2 socially as our city evolves so
3 much is this civic infrastructure.
4 The Free Library is building our
5 operational infrastructure to be a
6 civic learning and opportunity
7 network, a system that connects
8 residents not to just information,
9 but to skills, connections and
10 economic opportunities.

11 In this way, we are a
12 part of creating a Philadelphia
13 that is safer, cleaner, greener,
14 with access to economic opportunity
15 for all. This future is grounded
16 in a clear vision for our spaces,
17 flexible, adaptable environments
18 that can support everything from
19 early literacy programs to
20 workforce training, to public
21 meetings, welcoming places for play
22 and programming for all ages, from
23 toddlers to teens, to older adults,
24 civic hubs where residents engage

1 with government, community
2 organizations and one another, so
3 digital resource centers that
4 ensure equitable access to
5 technology and digital skills.

6 Modern libraries are not
7 just quiet repositories of books.
8 They are dynamic, multi-use
9 environments designed for
10 collaboration, creativity and
11 community connection. Our vision
12 reflects that reality and ensures
13 that Philadelphia keeps pace with
14 the best libraries in the country
15 and the world.

16 In some cases, new
17 building spaces can be very
18 successful, such as our library in
19 South Philadelphia, a collaborative
20 effort between the library, the
21 Children's Hospital of
22 Philadelphia, the Department of
23 Public Health and Philadelphia
24 Parks & Rec.

1 But just as importantly,
2 we have demonstrated that
3 extraordinary modern libraries can
4 be created within beautiful
5 historic buildings. Recent
6 transformations at the Frankford,
7 Kingsessing, Paschalville, Blanche
8 Nixon, Cobbs Creek, Lawncrest show
9 what is possible when we invest
10 thoughtfully. These projects, all
11 of which were completed in the past
12 year, preserve architectural
13 heritage while delivering modern,
14 flexible, technology-rich
15 environments that meet today's
16 needs.

17 We look for solutions
18 that are both fiscally responsible
19 and align with community identity.
20 This vision is not theoretical. It
21 is backed by real investment and
22 strong partnership with other city
23 agencies. For example, the Capital
24 Program Office has been a partner

1 in investing in projects in recent
2 years, including 48 million in
3 capital improvement projects
4 finished in Fiscal Year '25, and 28
5 million in additional projects
6 finished or in process right now.
7 These improvements include needed
8 roof replacements, HVAC repair and
9 several renovated libraries inside
10 and out.

11 At the Free Library, we
12 have been making open hours a
13 serious priority. Two years ago we
14 hired a director of property
15 management and have been building a
16 revitalized team to strengthen our
17 planning and systems to ensure we
18 make progress toward a bolder
19 future. With our team coming into
20 place, we're taking a more
21 systematic approach to planning.

22 A decade ago, through
23 the 21st century library
24 initiative, five total neighborhood

1 libraries were assessed and
2 upgraded to meeting changing needs
3 of those communities. The city
4 continued this work through its
5 Rebuild initiative by identifying
6 11 neighborhood libraries for
7 modernization to date.

8 Through the city's
9 continued support, we're now able
10 to complete 10 building facility
11 assessments per year, allowing us
12 to identify emerging issues before
13 they become a crisis, build a data-
14 driven understanding of system-wide
15 needs and develop the case for
16 strategic long-term capital
17 investment. This is exactly the
18 type of structured system-wide
19 approach the resolution calls for,
20 and we've already begun the work.

21 We finished the first 10
22 assessments and are lining up the
23 next 10 for next year. In the
24 meantime, we're addressing known

1 HVAC and roof issues with our
2 increased very much-appreciated
3 increased capital budget
4 allocation. If we only fix what is
5 broken, we'll fall behind. If we
6 only build new, we risk of leaving
7 communities waiting. The right
8 approach is a balanced, phased
9 investment strategy that does both.

10 We're grateful for the
11 strong support from City Council
12 and Mayor Parker's Administration.
13 We've been responsible stewards of
14 these resources and we are
15 committed to continuing the
16 stewardship. We're making
17 substantial progress with more open
18 hours, more renovated library
19 spaces and addressing many needed
20 deferred maintenance issues.

21 We're keeping most of
22 our library services open while
23 closing select locations for
24 upgrades. With this balanced

1 approach, we aim to make steady
2 progress for years to come. The
3 Free Library stands ready to
4 partner with you to build a system
5 that is moderate and resilient,
6 equitable and accessible, flexible
7 and future-ready and deeply rooted
8 in every neighborhood. A system
9 where truly access meets
10 opportunity. Thank you for your
11 leadership, your partnership, your
12 commitment to Philadelphia's
13 libraries. And I welcome any
14 questions.

15 COUNCILWOMAN LANDAU:

16 Thank you so much. I wanted to
17 start just asking some questions, a
18 little bit of a follow-up of what I
19 asked you during budget and then
20 we'll pass along to the committee
21 members. But if we are told as the
22 public that the main reason for
23 many closures during the deep
24 winter and the deep summer are HVAC

1 issues, why haven't you assessed
2 all library branches solely on HVAC
3 issues?

4 MR. RICHARDS: The
5 building assessments that are being
6 done by our contractors are
7 assessing everything in the
8 building. Our assessments that we
9 are doing for HVAC are taking place
10 by staff and our current
11 contractors who handle our HVAC
12 day-to-day needs. We are aware of
13 those particular issues.

14 Sometimes the systems,
15 some of them are very old and they
16 break, but we are assessing those
17 all the time. We're having people,
18 our contractors look at them and
19 our staff are looking at them.

20 COUNCILWOMAN LANDAU:
21 Have you assessed all libraries for
22 their HVAC needs?

23 MR. RICHARDS: I have
24 our Deputy of Property Management

1 here who can address how they've
2 gone out to assess and look at all
3 of those systems internally.

4 (Witnesses approached
5 witness table.)

6 MR. DUPASS: Good
7 morning. This is Ty Dupass,
8 Property Management. So internally
9 we are assessing all of the units.
10 We're working with our contractor,
11 not only to assess but to deal with
12 the units. I'll give you a perfect
13 example. As we're talking, we're
14 replacing the boiler at Wyoming. I
15 can't wait for another project to
16 come Wyoming's way, so we're
17 replacing the boiler now in
18 preparation for next winter.

19 While the HVAC system
20 may still be fair, we know that
21 boilers need to be replaced so
22 we're not waiting on that. So
23 that's why we need to continuously
24 do assessments. In addition to the

1 assessments, we work with the state
2 of Pennsylvania Department of Labor
3 Industry, who also monitors our
4 boilers. And if for whatever
5 reason they're looking at our
6 responsibilities and not
7 maintaining those boilers, they can
8 shut us down. We avoid that at all
9 costs. So we have a partnership in
10 Capital Programs obviously, but
11 also the Commonwealth, who comes
12 and monitors our boilers too. They
13 can come at any given time so it's
14 up to us too. And it's not just
15 the HVAC. It's the heating too.
16 It goes both ways, so to
17 continuously monitor that. You
18 come to our office now where
19 paperwork is all in the place. You
20 can open up the binder and see the
21 certificates that the state
22 witnessed the boiler, and that's
23 how we discovered the boiler at
24 Bustleton was bad, and that's how

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1 we were able to replace it. So
2 it's a continuous thing externally
3 with the assessments. They're
4 doing a comprehensive study, but
5 internally we have to continue to
6 do the day-to-day stuff.

7 COUNCILWOMAN LANDAU:

8 Thank you. Thank you for that
9 answer. Happy May Day. Today is
10 May 1st. It is nice to --

11 (Applause.)

12 COUNCILWOMAN LANDAU:

13 It's nice to talk about boilers
14 now. We should get to a place
15 where we're going to fix boilers in
16 the summer and where we can fix
17 air-conditioning when it starts
18 getting warm enough. But right now
19 we have a problem that many of the
20 libraries likely won't open due to
21 air-conditioning and air
22 management.

23 You said you are
24 assessing each library branch.

1 There's not that many. Have you
2 assessed each library branch solely
3 on HVAC to decide what you need to
4 do, but maybe focusing specifically
5 on rising to the top, the ones that
6 need air-conditioning, because
7 we're moving into that season, not
8 the boiler season?

9 MR. RICHARDS: Yes.

10 I'll let Ty address that. But the
11 systems are old. We're assessing
12 them to make sure that none of the
13 buildings close. We know that more
14 need to be replaced. We have
15 already made that assessment.
16 We're trying our best to keep them
17 operational until we go through the
18 process of replacing them, but I
19 will let Ty explain that from a
20 more technical perspective.

21 COUNCILWOMAN LANDAU:

22 Let me ask some more technical
23 questions too while you're doing
24 that. That's interesting. You say

1 staff helps too. Is this turning
2 on the air-conditioner to see if it
3 works? What are we talking about
4 here when we know that there's an
5 air-conditioning system that didn't
6 work last summer, therefore, a
7 library was closed last summer.
8 Are we assessing it again now to
9 see whether it's going to work this
10 summer or could we just go out and
11 fix it?

12 MR. RICHARDS: When they
13 break, we fix them. We work on
14 them and fix them, even if they're
15 ones that we know over time where
16 the whole system needs to be gutted
17 and replaced. But we go in and we
18 fix the system to keep it running,
19 knowing that at some point it's
20 going to be in the queue because
21 it's not as bad as some of the
22 other ones where we know we need to
23 replace it and it's already higher
24 in the queue.

1 MR. DUPASS: So we just
2 completed changeover from winter to
3 summer. There's some boilers and
4 air-conditioning equipment that are
5 not on automatic building
6 management system and electronic
7 computerized system, so we have to
8 go out physically to the ones that
9 are not to make sure that they're
10 working. Between the contractor
11 and our internal staff of HVAC
12 technicians, we're constantly
13 monitoring, especially the ones
14 that are not on the system, to make
15 sure they're running optimally.

16 We have changes of
17 filters and belts to make sure
18 everything's running smoothly. And
19 from time to time when we get in
20 trouble, if a motor blows for
21 whatever reason, we're at the mercy
22 of waiting for that part. Because
23 the systems are older, we have to
24 wait for that part before it's

1 replaced, but we're continuously
2 monitoring the system.

3 COUNCILWOMAN LANDAU: Do
4 you believe that all libraries are
5 at the point now where they would
6 be open this summer, they can
7 remain open this summer?

8 MR. RICHARDS: At this
9 particular point, are there any
10 issues with ones -- I believe that
11 they will be open. The thing is
12 you just don't know if something's
13 going to happen because some of the
14 systems are old, and that is why we
15 have our contractors in place to
16 address those issues when they come
17 up until we get new systems in
18 every one of our locations.

19 COUNCILWOMAN LANDAU: I
20 fully understand that things break.
21 I know you're talking about
22 hypotheticals. You're also saying
23 at this very moment though you
24 believe that the HVAC systems are

1 functioning enough at every library
2 that each library can remain open
3 in the summer?

4 MR. RICHARDS: At this
5 time, are there any issues with any
6 that we don't think will open? I
7 believe we're okay right now. It
8 just I don't want to get -- we've
9 got projects in the queue for ones
10 we know we need to work on. We
11 have those particular projects in
12 our queue where we're going to try
13 to stay open as long as we can,
14 while those libraries are worked
15 on.

16 I just know from older
17 buildings that sometimes things
18 happen. But the ones that we are
19 concerned about at this particular
20 time that have raised to that level
21 are being addressed in this fiscal
22 year.

23 COUNCILWOMAN LANDAU:
24 Okay. Thank you. I wanted to pass

1 it along to colleagues who have
2 questions.

3 Chair recognizes
4 Councilmember Anthony Phillips.

5 COUNCILMAN PHILLIPS:

6 Thank you all so much for your
7 testimony today. I was able to
8 listen and read it thoroughly. I
9 just have a couple questions. I
10 wanted to follow up on Vice-Chair
11 Rule Landau's comments.

12 So the idea of
13 providing -- Ty, I think she was
14 trying to mention in terms of the
15 question, which was kind of my
16 question, is that do you have a
17 strategic plan on how you're going
18 to address HVAC at the library?
19 Meaning like year one, we're
20 focused on HVAC for these libraries
21 that have deficiencies, year two,
22 year three, what is the process?
23 And then also, do we have a steady
24 maintenance plan, right?

1 So most companies and
2 organizations having these plans
3 are important, right. And I just
4 think what you have said, if I
5 heard correctly what I'm hearing
6 from you, Ty, is that we are
7 constantly looking at the issue,
8 which to me that sounds reactionary
9 as opposed to being proactive. Do
10 you have a proactive strategy to
11 it?

12 MR. RICHARDS: Yes. The
13 strategy started with hiring our
14 Director of Property Management.
15 We are currently in the process of
16 building out a strategic plan for
17 the whole library system that
18 includes our property management
19 concerns. We're also in the
20 process of doing these building
21 condition assessments, which we
22 already have 10 done, and we are
23 working on going out to bid for 10
24 more.

1 We also have a new
2 performance asset tool that's
3 helping us track all of our assets,
4 which includes all of our HVC
5 systems and boiler units and
6 mechanical systems through our
7 system so -- I mean, throughout the
8 library. And we're using our
9 internal staff to go out to assess,
10 continue, monitor, maintain those
11 HVAC systems with our contractors,
12 so this is the strategy and this is
13 our plan as we build out that
14 larger building assessment.

15 COUNCILMAN PHILLIPS: So
16 you're saying there's 10 buildings
17 that you have a strategic plan for,
18 10 library buildings?

19 MR. RICHARDS: That's
20 correct.

21 COUNCILMAN PHILLIPS:
22 Okay. Can you share that plan with
23 Council?

24 MR. RICHARDS: Yes.

1 COUNCILMAN PHILLIPS:

2 And what that looks like, if it's
3 detailed. And then my next
4 question was centered on the
5 assessment. I just received word
6 about the West Oak Lane Library,
7 they're going to be closed until
8 August. That's why it was
9 reported. And I'm saying, how do
10 you make those types of decisions
11 for libraries to close for that
12 long? Why would it be that long
13 for HVAC to be fixed in that
14 particular predicament?

15 MR. RICHARDS: That's a
16 little technical so I'll let Ty
17 answer.

18 MR. DUPASS: So we're
19 just not replacing the system where
20 you go down to Home Depot and just
21 replace it. It required after the
22 design, after we get the equipment,
23 there's a lead time of anywhere
24 between 8 to 10 weeks, sometimes

1 more, demo of the old equipment,
2 any modifications of any supports,
3 electrical work, upgrade the
4 capacity of the electricity,
5 building out the infrastructure for
6 the BAS system, in addition to the
7 installation, any modification of
8 duct work, testing and balancing.

9 COUNCILMAN PHILLIPS: So
10 why can't we get something like
11 that in writing that we can give to
12 community members who are grossly
13 concerned with a timeline of that
14 nature, right? So it's about
15 communication and transparency, you
16 know. And I keep saying it's one
17 of the reasons why the mayor in New
18 York is so popular right now is
19 because he does a great job from
20 his administrative standpoint being
21 transparent. I believe in
22 transparency. And we have to be
23 honest with people and say, no
24 matter how hard it is, this is the

1 reason why this is the timeline.
2 Because in their mind, it's now
3 April and you're telling me August
4 to put in the HVAC.

5 Is that really the best
6 you could do? Are there
7 preparations we could have done
8 before the closure to mitigate
9 that? I mean, these are
10 conversations that the community
11 could potentially be a part of and
12 say, before you close it all away,
13 you know, this is important, can
14 you -- due to order materials for 8
15 to 10 weeks that you said, while
16 we're still here, can we have
17 something, maybe we get some
18 fans -- or not fans, but window
19 air-conditioners or I don't know,
20 something that it just feels a lot
21 more transparent? And then say,
22 okay, once the materials are here,
23 we're going to start the
24 construction, everyone has to

1 leave, so that way people don't
2 have to wait so long. Have we
3 thought through that?

4 MR. RICHARDS: Yes. We
5 try to keep them open as long as we
6 can and, you know, I guess to a
7 point where we've got to shut it
8 down because of the temperatures,
9 but we try to keep it open even if
10 we can work in certain parts of the
11 building.

12 COUNCILMAN PHILLIPS:
13 Okay.

14 MR. RICHARDS: Which
15 that's our goal, is to try to do
16 that.

17 COUNCILMAN PHILLIPS:
18 And the last question I have, just
19 for now, assessing all the units,
20 how long is it going to take to
21 assess all these units in terms of
22 the HVAC? I think Councilmember
23 Landau was mentioning HVAC. I just
24 heard a boiler is broken down at

1 East Oak Lane Library. What's the
2 time frame to assess the stability
3 of it?

4 MR. RICHARDS: The
5 larger building assessment, which
6 is a more complex, detailed
7 assessment with multiple
8 contractors involving in several
9 areas of the building, those take
10 longer. I think this particular
11 time it was about 9 months to do
12 the 10 and those take a while, but
13 their shelf life isn't long because
14 of cost of doing business and
15 everything. So what we're doing --

16 COUNCILMAN PHILLIPS:
17 You said it's nine months to assess
18 the state of a library?

19 MR. RICHARDS: We do our
20 own assessments, as I mentioned
21 earlier, in regards to some of the
22 needs and concerns that we see from
23 our regular contractors and our
24 staff.

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1 MS. PALANTINO: Good
2 morning. Aparna Palantino, Deputy
3 Managing Director, Capital Program
4 Office. I just want to clarify,
5 Councilmember, you're asking about
6 the building assessments or --

7 COUNCILMAN PHILLIPS:
8 Yeah, the building assessments.

9 MS. PALANTINO: So the
10 building assessment start to end
11 was a nine-month process because
12 that includes finding a firm to do
13 it all the way to a final report.
14 The reason they take that long,
15 they're just not going to a
16 building, look at it, see what's
17 working, what's not. There was
18 also extensive work done with the
19 staff to help identify improvements
20 needed for program purposes, you
21 know, what do libraries need today,
22 what are some programs they would
23 like to have. So it was not only
24 just the physical assessment, but

1 it was also an operational and
2 programmatic assessment. So those
3 take weeks of time to engage staff
4 at multiple levels, both
5 administrative executive staff but
6 also on-site staff. So those
7 conversations, not only physical,
8 which included architects,
9 mechanical engineer, plumbing
10 engineers to assess all those
11 systems, structural engineers, but
12 also the programmatic components.

13 So each library, if you
14 will, took a number of weeks. So
15 cumulatively, it was done by the
16 same team. So we have a very good
17 standard across every facility and
18 the goal is to continue that for
19 all the branches. We know some of
20 them, as Kelly mentioned, were
21 recently renovated. So of course
22 those 10 or 11 are fine and have
23 just reopened from major
24 transformation.

1 So we work with the
2 library staff to identify each
3 cohort of sites for assessment.
4 It's based on the research done
5 internally to say these are the
6 ones that the facility staff have
7 noticed have continual problems.
8 Those rise to the top. The sites
9 are identified based on priority
10 that way.

11 Those are also used --
12 you'll see when we forward the
13 assessment -- the first 10
14 libraries alone, they have about
15 \$21 million just of critical
16 infrastructure needs. That doesn't
17 even begin to address the
18 operational and programmatic needs.
19 It was upwards of \$100 million for
20 10 libraries. So we take that
21 information and then we ask for
22 that money in the capital budget.

23 So the purpose of those
24 assessments is not only to evaluate

1 the physical and programmatic
2 concerns with every facility, but
3 it's also to strategically request
4 the funds in future capital
5 budgets. We would love to have a
6 billion dollars to fix everything,
7 but we are trying to be fiscally
8 responsible.

9 COUNCILMAN PHILLIPS:

10 Yeah. No, I get it. The only
11 thing I just want to say is, just
12 like Councilmember Landau's
13 question, when I was in the
14 nonprofit sector, you can pick the
15 long-term strategic plan process or
16 the shorter strategic plan process.
17 There is no way we want to rush
18 things. However, you can do an
19 assessment with staff at a shorter
20 period of time than extending it
21 out for months and months and
22 months for dialogue. They'll
23 probably prefer more action than
24 anything.

1 And then also, I just
2 think that it's -- I understand
3 right now there's been a halt on
4 the capital large scale, what we
5 will call Rebuild, right, but now
6 it's called Capital Projects. I
7 just don't understand because we
8 should be able to tell the public
9 who is still receiving this
10 beverage tax, right, that there is
11 money that's being put together
12 strategically to do larger-scale
13 projects in every single
14 councilmanic district, and right
15 now libraries should be a part of
16 it.

17 Is there a plan right
18 now, Aparna, where you could say
19 every year we're going to be doing
20 different councilmanic districts
21 libraries that have been untouched,
22 libraries have been untouched in
23 different districts, and be it
24 through Rebuild which now is called

1 Capital Project? And I'm going to
2 turn it over. I'm talking too
3 much. Y'all got me excited.

4 MS. PALANTINO: So with
5 regards to the question around
6 Rebuild, that was a point-in-time
7 initiative, you know, in
8 partnership with City Council to
9 identify a certain cohort of parks,
10 rec centers and libraries. It also
11 had external funding sources. But
12 the intent is to continue making
13 those investments.

14 In fact, in the Capital
15 Program this year and for the next
16 five years, there has been a
17 significant increase of 500% in the
18 amount of investment being put into
19 libraries to ensure that these
20 branches stay open. If there is a
21 particular library for a particular
22 concern that needs to be completely
23 renovated, a larger scale, that's a
24 conversation certainly with

1 Councilmembers that we have, and
2 the library, it gets prioritized to
3 be a particular type of project.
4 The 21st century libraries were an
5 example of that. It's not just the
6 city. It's partnerships with
7 external funders.

8 COUNCILMAN PHILLIPS:

9 Because right now the funding is
10 coming from District
11 Councilmembers' ITEFs and we also
12 have to negotiate like, hey, from
13 the budget standpoint should we
14 focus on this. To me, this is why
15 this idea of doing an additional
16 tax, there's mistrust, right,
17 because the city has not even
18 managed a tax that was supposed to
19 continue on just for these type of
20 facilities, libraries, recreation
21 centers and so forth. I'm just
22 saying I think you will want to
23 revisit that because people need to
24 see those results.

1 I'll turn it over to

2 Chair Landau.

3 COUNCILWOMAN LANDAU:

4 Thank you. I'm going to pass it in

5 just one second to our colleague,

6 who I know is waiting very

7 patiently. But I really just have

8 to say this. Thank you for the

9 work that you are doing right now.

10 But I want to be clear, one quick

11 question, are you using the same

12 firm for all of the library

13 assessments?

14 MS. PALANTINO: For the

15 first 10, we did. The next one we

16 are soliciting firms, but we're

17 using that framework and asking

18 each new cohort of any firm that is

19 selected to follow that same, so we

20 have an apples-to-apples comparison

21 of the entire system so we don't

22 end up with information in

23 different formats.

24 COUNCILWOMAN LANDAU: I

1 think what I want to say now, and
2 I'll pass it over and we'll come
3 back to this, is that none of this
4 is new information. The thing that
5 is mind-boggling here is that we
6 know that we've had libraries in
7 serious physical deterioration for
8 a long time. We know things have
9 been broken. And it's this
10 framework that you've created,
11 which has gotten us only 10
12 libraries done, sounds good, great,
13 whatever, but we've known all of
14 this stuff.

15 Have you not been
16 gathering your own maintenance and
17 repair requests and assessing them
18 up until now in a way that would
19 actually effectuate getting some
20 repairs done, getting our staff to
21 be in comfortable healthy
22 conditions, and opening it up to
23 the public? It's really amazing to
24 me to hear some of this, like none

1 of this is new information.

2 And even without the
3 money, as somebody who ran two city
4 agencies, I can tell you nothing
5 stopped you from creating a plan
6 and gathering this information
7 yourself and then always coming
8 back and saying, we need money to
9 do X. So again, I'm glad you're
10 doing it now, but this is not new
11 information.

12 MS. PALANTINO: You're
13 absolutely correct. And as Ty
14 mentioned earlier, that is an
15 ongoing process. So the projects
16 we identified, we worked on last
17 year, the investment of 48 million
18 in completed projects was not based
19 on those assessments. The 26
20 million that is currently under way
21 is not based on those assessments.
22 Those assessments help to inform
23 FY27 and the next five years
24 beyond, that is where that request

1 came.

2 But again, there could
3 be branches that Ty and his team,
4 through their regular ongoing
5 review of these systems, identify
6 that will take higher priority than
7 anything listed in that assessment,
8 because that is an ongoing
9 continual review of systems. They
10 do that on a daily basis.

11 COUNCILMAN PHILLIPS:

12 Two seconds --

13 COUNCILWOMAN LANDAU:

14 Hold on -- Chair recognizes
15 Councilmember Anthony Phillips.

16 COUNCILMAN PHILLIPS: I
17 just want to note, Kelly, I know
18 you work hard, I know that Aparna
19 works hard. Ty, you're the lead on
20 this. Your responses to these
21 questions makes me worried. You
22 see, because you should be an
23 expert in on the data, the
24 information, the numbers and you

1 should be able to articulate a
2 strategic plan.

3 Just my feedback is that
4 you shouldn't be reactionary. You
5 should be more proactive to this
6 issue, and be able to say, here's
7 the information, here's my
8 assessments that I know of, of all
9 these libraries, and be able to
10 say, I can't do much, I don't have
11 a -- whatever that might be, but I
12 think your answers have to be -- as
13 the lead on the libraries, I feel
14 like you have to become much more
15 of an expert. So that's my
16 encouragement and support of you,
17 because I just wasn't pleased with
18 the fact that, you know, Richards,
19 who's handling a lot of the
20 operations in the libraries, right,
21 I think he has to rely a lot more
22 on you going forward or someone who
23 can really create a strategy for a
24 really serious, serious problem in

1 our city. And I just want to say
2 that's incredibly important. So
3 that's just my feedback. I'm done.

4 COUNCILWOMAN LANDAU:

5 Chair recognizes Councilmember
6 Jeffrey Young.

7 COUNCILMAN YOUNG: Thank
8 you, Madam Chair.

9 And I also want to echo,
10 Ty, I know you work very hard, and
11 Kelly and Aparna, our office are
12 engaging often on matters and I
13 thank you for that. Some of the
14 questions I have are -- so just
15 want to put things in perspective
16 about our library system.

17 One, so the Philadelphia
18 Museum of Art, Art Museum -- I
19 don't know what the name is now,
20 one of them -- they see about
21 800,000 visitors per year, right.
22 And our Free Library system as a
23 whole sees about 6 million visitors
24 a year. And just putting that

1 number into perspective, based on
2 the capital improvement, capital
3 investments over the Five Year
4 Plan, we're investing 12 million
5 for the Art Museum over the Five
6 Year Plan cycle for capital
7 investments. For our library
8 system over the Five Year Plan
9 cycle, we're investing \$39 million
10 over five years for 54 libraries,
11 so that turns out to be \$2.50 of
12 capital investment per visitor for
13 the Art Museum, and for our library
14 system is \$0.59 per visitor for our
15 library. So those are numbers I
16 want to put in perspective when you
17 break it down based on the users of
18 the system, because that's what
19 it's all about.

20 It's about the users of
21 the system, the experience they
22 have when they come to our
23 libraries, the infrastructure, how
24 comfortable they are, that's what

1 it's about. And is that enough,
2 right? Is the number that we put
3 forward in our Five Year Plan
4 really enough to address the issues
5 that we have in our library system?

6 MR. RICHARDS: You're
7 asking a Library Director that
8 question. You know, that's a very
9 good question and a question
10 library directors across the
11 country like to hear. I, as the
12 Library Director here at one of the
13 greatest library systems in the
14 world and the country, whatever
15 support that we can get to make
16 these libraries better to serve our
17 communities even more extensively
18 than what we do now to keep the
19 buildings open, I'll take whatever
20 support we can get.

21 COUNCILMAN YOUNG: I
22 just want to note that if we are
23 going to be investing in arts and
24 culture scenes, right, our free

1 libraries, our free libraries of
2 Philadelphia, a place that is for
3 Philadelphians, I think we deserve
4 a little bit more attention and
5 investment in that space. So just
6 something to put on a record.

7 Now, are you able to
8 tell us what libraries have already
9 been assessed?

10 MR. RICHARDS: Sure, we
11 can get that.

12 MS. PALANTINO: Yes, so
13 the 10 libraries in the first
14 cohort?

15 COUNCILMAN YOUNG: Yes.

16 MS. PALANTINO:
17 Bustleton, Falls -- I can send the
18 list if you'd like.

19 COUNCILMAN YOUNG: If
20 you have it, I would like it for
21 the record so we can hear what
22 libraries.

23 MS. PALANTINO:
24 Certainly, Bustleton Library, Falls

1 of Schuylkill Library, Fox Chase,
2 Joseph E. Coleman, Kensington,
3 Lucien Blackwell, Oak Lane,
4 Rodriguez, Torresdale and
5 Wynnefield.

6 COUNCILMAN YOUNG: Thank
7 you. And when you are assessing
8 the libraries, as some of my
9 colleagues mentioned, I think that
10 there should be a way to do this
11 quicker when you have work orders
12 that have already been put in place
13 at certain libraries. So that has
14 to work for the contractor, right,
15 so I think we can move a little bit
16 quicker.

17 But what exactly are you
18 looking for? What exactly is in
19 these building assessments that you
20 received back so far?

21 MS. PALANTINO: So it's
22 a comprehensive assessment of the
23 entire physical structure, from the
24 structure itself, all of the

1 mechanical systems, the electrical,
2 plumbing, it is the interior
3 finishes, it is the organization of
4 the building itself, as I
5 mentioned, on top of the physical
6 infrastructure, top to bottom
7 essentially. Everything in the
8 building is being commented on,
9 roofs.

10 We're also doing a
11 programmatic assessment, working
12 with staff to see how could this
13 library be reconfigured to address
14 the needs of today, so that's not a
15 one-hour visual review. That's
16 several days of conversation, and
17 then if the library potentially
18 needs to be reconfigured to be able
19 to accommodate that new program
20 that would suit today's needs.

21 COUNCILMAN YOUNG: Thank
22 you. That just alluded to my next
23 question. How long does this
24 assessment take out with the

1 contractor? How long are they
2 taking to assess the 10 libraries
3 on average? How long did it take
4 them to come up with that
5 assessment?

6 MS. PALANTINO: So the
7 actual work on site or in the
8 branch is about two weeks, two to
9 three weeks. That final
10 compilation of the report, the way
11 the information is presented, I
12 know Ty has spent many, many hours,
13 as is Kelly and my team, reviewing
14 those assessments, so there's a
15 draft submitted. We send it back
16 saying we need the information in a
17 way that can be broken down by
18 systems, it can be broken down by
19 priorities. So the actual work is
20 not that long. We do get that raw
21 information. But then configuring
22 it in a way that the library can
23 react to certain things sooner
24 rather than later takes a little

1 bit of back and forth.

2 COUNCILMAN YOUNG: So I
3 understand that. But if we've only
4 budgeted for 10 of these a year,
5 but the actual work doesn't take
6 that long, right, so why are we
7 only doing 10?

8 MS. PALANTINO: So I
9 will say there's two main reasons.
10 The information, as I mentioned
11 from the first 10, the need was to
12 address all of what was assessed is
13 upwards of 100 million for 10
14 branches. We don't have 100
15 million immediately to put into 10
16 branches, right. So then we get to
17 the next 10, you get another 100
18 million so that just keeps going.
19 And what happens is then those
20 assessments, the information is no
21 longer valid by the time you
22 actually get to making those
23 improvements based on allocations.
24 So we had done this --

1 I'm dating myself, but I wasn't
2 with Parks and Recreation at the
3 time, but there was an assessment
4 done in the mid-2000s for the
5 entire system, every single rec
6 center. However, what happened is
7 certainly no one got to making
8 those improvements, you know, that
9 is again billions of dollars.

10 And what happened is
11 half of those assessments just sat
12 there. There was no productive
13 outcome. So we spent money to do
14 that, the information -- even a
15 roof assessed today, in 10 years
16 may not be a good roof. The
17 mechanical system that might be
18 fine today in three years may not
19 be fine. So the information no
20 longer has any validity and we've
21 spent the money to just create
22 documents that then sit on shelves.

23 So we are being very
24 strategic in taking the facilities

1 that are in condition that will
2 have issues in that priority.
3 That's how we prioritize the sites
4 that we are assessing. We know
5 that there's serious issues with
6 these 10. Let's figure out what
7 they are, how much it's going to
8 cost, take those numbers, put them
9 into a capital ask to present to
10 City Council to say, we know these
11 are real needs, can you fund these.

12 There's a lot in those
13 assessments that we know we may not
14 get to, you know, changing the --
15 I'm just going to say the paint
16 color, right. For example, maybe
17 there's a color that would be more
18 suitable, it needs to freshen up.
19 That's not even the highest
20 priority. That's priority 3, you
21 know. HVAC roofs, fire alarms,
22 those are the things that are the
23 highest priority. Those are the
24 investments we're asking for when

1 we present the capital budget to
2 City Council.

3 COUNCILMAN YOUNG: So in
4 having some of the libraries, we
5 know that each library may not have
6 the same level of need, right. So
7 we can prioritize the ones that
8 have that higher level, even if we
9 do more than 10 at a time, right,
10 because we know they just need
11 paint, we can just, you know, move
12 them a little lower than the one
13 that needs an entire roof and HVAC
14 system and things like that.

15 So I just think that 10
16 at a time we're piecemealing it
17 together. And I don't know if for
18 our communities that is to be
19 acceptable because the buildings
20 are going to continue to
21 deteriorate as you wait 10 at a
22 time, like. Are you able to tell
23 us who the next 10 are?

24 MS. PALANTINO: Yes, I

1 just have one question here. But
2 they're Fumo, Eastwick, Walnut
3 West, Haverford, Widener,
4 Holmesburg, Wyoming, Ogontz,
5 Greater Olney and Welsh Road. And
6 we can submit those to you as well.

7 COUNCILMAN YOUNG: Thank
8 you. So just a question for
9 Mr. Richards. The Library
10 describes the system describes
11 libraries as a civic, learning and
12 opportunity network with flex space
13 for working training literacy
14 programs, digital access. But what
15 level of operating funds, right now
16 we're talking about operating
17 funds, is actually needed to make
18 this vision real in every
19 neighborhood, in every branch?

20 MR. RICHARDS: Can you
21 repeat the question?

22 COUNCILMAN YOUNG: So
23 essentially, there are programs
24 that happen in some libraries that

1 don't happen in others, right.
2 Workforce training programs, early
3 literacy, whatever type program it
4 is. The programming isn't equal.
5 And so, just asking has there been
6 any assessment on what investment
7 is needed to ensure that there is
8 access to equitable programming
9 throughout our system?

10 MR. RICHARDS: Good
11 question, Councilman. Thank you.
12 For the last two years, we've
13 received from you and the city and
14 the Mayor significant funding for
15 programming for our libraries,
16 funding we've never received
17 before. And that has allowed us to
18 push out some programming from our
19 Central Office out to our
20 neighborhood libraries in a way we
21 haven't done before.

22 Again, you're asking a
23 librarian if we want more money.
24 The dollars that we have are

1 providing the level of programming
2 that we need for our locations, as
3 we build our capacity with our
4 staff at our locations. As we
5 continue to build our capacity,
6 there will be more opportunities
7 for us to do more programming at
8 those locations.

9 But at this particular
10 time, with the support that not
11 only do we get from our Foundation
12 dollars, but what we get from the
13 city, the kinds of programming that
14 we do at our neighborhood
15 libraries, that funding is in a
16 really good place.

17 COUNCILMAN YOUNG: Tell
18 us some of the challenges you're
19 having with staff. You've
20 mentioned that.

21 MR. RICHARDS: Well, the
22 challenges or we're working our way
23 through, I'll phrase it that way,
24 that we're working our way through

1 was that we were understaffed for a
2 very long time. It takes near 1000
3 employees to run our library
4 system. When I started as Library
5 Director, we had 620 or 630, and it
6 had been that way for a very long
7 time. But now -- our HR department
8 has worked really hard, our
9 staffing levels have increased.

10 Our staff have worked
11 hard to train the new staff and we
12 have put people in place throughout
13 our neighborhood libraries to
14 provide the support that's
15 necessary to provide the level of
16 programming that we are actually
17 doing now. Actually, our
18 programming numbers have gone up
19 substantially, as I believe you've
20 got some of that data, because of
21 the resources that you've given us,
22 the resources the Mayor have given
23 us to do some of the programming.

24 Our staff has always

1 been creative to provide necessary
2 programming for our neighborhood
3 libraries, and they did it really
4 just making it happen. But now,
5 we've got some of the resources to
6 support their efforts. And because
7 of those resources, our numbers
8 have gone up.

9 COUNCILMAN YOUNG: Thank
10 you. I have a few other questions
11 if you mind, Madam Chair. Thank
12 you.

13 I want to touch on the
14 HVAC issues. Can you tell us just
15 over the past two years how many
16 closures happened in our system
17 because of the HVAC and other
18 issues?

19 MR. RICHARDS: Do you
20 have that number on you?

21 COUNCILMAN YOUNG: And
22 what's the typical turnaround time
23 been to resolve those?

24 MR. RICHARDS: You know

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1 what, Councilman, that's something
2 we don't have quick access to. If
3 not --

4 COUNCILMAN YOUNG: If
5 not, it's okay. You can submit
6 that information --

7 MR. RICHARDS: I can
8 submit that information.

9 COUNCILMAN YOUNG: --
10 with those numbers. But I know in
11 my district alone we had, you know,
12 Fishtown closed for some time. We
13 had Rodriguez had some issues,
14 Marrero had some issues.

15 MR. RICHARDS: I will
16 say this, our numbers has
17 increased, our opening hours have
18 increased in regards to our HVAC
19 issues. I can tell you that
20 because I really feel good about
21 that, but I will submit that
22 information to you, the actual
23 data.

24 COUNCILMAN YOUNG: Thank

1 you. I've been on Council for --
2 this is my third year. And then
3 Cecil B. Moore had issues. It was
4 four libraries that I know of,
5 right, in my district, in the last
6 two and a half years. So if you
7 could really provide us with that
8 information, that'd be helpful,
9 because we want to help you invest
10 in that. We want to see where the
11 problems are occurring so we can
12 invest. That's our job as
13 Councilmembers because we want to
14 help.

15 MR. RICHARDS: I'll get
16 that to you.

17 COUNCILMAN YOUNG: And
18 just the last question, what
19 patterns do you see across the
20 branches? What are some of the
21 conditions that you see popping up
22 on a regular basis? And can tell
23 us what communities do you see
24 those issues occurring in?

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1 MR. RICHARDS: Issues,
2 can you be more specific?

3 COUNCILMAN YOUNG: So
4 I'm sure that there are work orders
5 put in from folks in the system.
6 What are some of the common issues
7 that you see, that Ty sees over and
8 over again? And what neighborhoods
9 are these recurring issues
10 happening?

11 MR. DUPASS: So for one,
12 we rarely talk about it, but we
13 have ADA accessibility issues.
14 When I think about Donna Tucci,
15 there's no ADA accessibility in
16 terms of ramps or anything like
17 that. Roof leaks, we don't discuss
18 Eastwick a lot but we just replaced
19 a portion of the roof at Eastwick.
20 They were having chronic roof
21 issues. So we're talking about
22 roof issues, ADA issues.

23 Windows, so if we're
24 installing HVAC, we should be also

1 installing windows. We did a roof
2 project at Joseph E. Coleman last
3 year where we were only able to do
4 the upper top windows at the time
5 and we hope to circle back and
6 replace the bottom windows. But
7 when we're talking about the HVAC,
8 it's important to also think about
9 the envelope, whether it's a roof
10 or windows or anything like that,
11 front entrances, making sure doors
12 are secure. So it sometimes goes
13 beyond HVAC.

14 And to clarify something
15 previously, the strategy we're
16 working on now we are implementing
17 the system Performer, which a lot
18 of organ agencies use. I have data
19 that when we implement this system,
20 we'll be tracking these systems in
21 realtime. So when I came here, I
22 had to guesstimate what had a
23 deficiency and what didn't have a
24 deficiency.

1 Now, we're documenting
2 data and for each asset, we'll have
3 a life cycle of that asset. When
4 we did the last inspection, when we
5 replace belts and filters and
6 things like that, that's something
7 we're implementing and developing
8 now. When I first came aboard, I
9 had an email, a book full of data
10 telling me what the problem was,
11 but it wasn't helping me. So over
12 the past year, I've been codifying
13 that data. So now when I implement
14 the system, I have all of that
15 stuff in front of me so we can be
16 more strategic. So it's not just
17 relying on work orders and things
18 like that. I need to see the full
19 picture with everything in the
20 building. I just wanted to make
21 that clarification.

22 COUNCILMAN YOUNG: Thank
23 you. My last question: In the
24 budget book, it mentions that the

1 Parkway Central branch has been
2 getting upgrades in public safety
3 with a gunshot detection system.
4 Are there any other libraries
5 getting a gunshot detection system?

6 MR. RICHARDS: Not at
7 this time. This would be our first
8 opportunity to actually see and
9 work through this process, and
10 we'll look at how we would roll
11 that out anywhere else.

12 COUNCILMAN YOUNG: So
13 can I ask why was the Central
14 Library chosen if you look at data
15 around libraries where violence
16 occurs? I can tell you I represent
17 the Cecil B. Moore Library and then
18 other libraries in our city where I
19 know those communities could
20 benefit from such technology?

21 I mean, I represent the
22 Central Library as well. So the
23 data doesn't really correlate to
24 the type of investment that's being

1 made here. So I'm just wondering
2 if we can invest in this type of
3 technology at our libraries and
4 some of the neighborhoods that
5 actually experience or are going
6 through gun violence on an everyday
7 basis?

8 MR. RICHARDS: Oh,
9 absolutely, Councilman. We've got
10 the people there to actually judge
11 it, see how well it works, you
12 know, utilize it, and then it's an
13 opportunity to push it out. I
14 would like it to go everywhere now.
15 Yeah, absolutely. But this gives
16 us an opportunity to actually see
17 if this is the best system, this is
18 the best process and to judge --

19 COUNCILMAN YOUNG: How,
20 when there's no gunshots downtown?

21 MR. RICHARDS: It's more
22 than just gunshots. It's also a
23 communication tool through all the
24 staff in the building on how we

1 will reach out to them, so it's a
2 little bit more detailed than that.
3 But I can provide you with the
4 information on actually how it
5 works. I don't have it here in
6 front of me or the staff person,
7 our Director of Security who's
8 actually over it, but I can get you
9 that information.

10 COUNCILMAN YOUNG: Thank
11 you.

12 Thank you, Madam Chair.

13 COUNCILWOMAN LANDAU:
14 Thank you. I just want to do one
15 quick follow-up before we get to
16 the next panel on the Performance
17 Asset tool that you're getting.
18 Can you tell us a little bit more
19 about that? And if -- first, tell
20 me and then I've got to follow up,
21 because I hope this answers my
22 question.

23 MR. DUPASS: So in
24 addition to the work order system,

1 where a user submits a work order
2 to the staff, they go out and they
3 fix it. Part of that too with the
4 work order is to communicate the
5 progress of that work order, not
6 just to fix it, don't let anybody
7 know, like the Councilperson was
8 saying, communication is key,
9 right.

10 But in addition to that,
11 with our vendors we're also making
12 sure that vendors have
13 accountability as well as the
14 in-house staff to make sure that
15 equipment like a (inaudible) or a
16 handle unit is being taken care of,
17 making sure our annual inspections
18 are being done in a timely manner.
19 We're taking the information, we're
20 inputting it. We'll have a list of
21 those assets, the newer ones and
22 the older ones, and building out a
23 profile so we can track the
24 lifetime of that piece of

1 equipment, how much money we spent
2 on it, parts and everything, track
3 for trends like why are we spending
4 some money on this boiler here,
5 what's wrong with this boiler that
6 we got to spend so much money and
7 wrench time, labor hours on this
8 particular thing.

9 What we're confronting
10 right now is like a classic game of
11 Whack-a-Mole, and that's not a
12 process that I personally want to
13 participate in going through the
14 system. So we're trying to get a
15 systematic approach and more
16 strategy and being transparent
17 where anybody can say, hey, look,
18 this is what FLP is doing.

19 So our goal is to be
20 strategic and transparent at the
21 same time so we're not, you know,
22 you don't have to ask these
23 questions, you know what we're
24 doing and what we're not doing is

1 clear. And, you know, being
2 transparent to the public. It's a
3 public trust. But that's it.
4 Just --

5 COUNCILWOMAN LANDAU:

6 Thank you all so much. I
7 appreciate so much you're telling
8 us all this. It seems the library
9 has been struggling for so long.
10 It's a little shocking this is only
11 happening now. Thank you for doing
12 it. But it's a little shocking
13 that it's only happening now. Very
14 glad that we'll be tracking things
15 and know that if we're putting way
16 too much money for too long into an
17 old boiler, it's time to get a new
18 boiler. Appreciate you.

19 If there's no further
20 questions for this panel, thank you
21 very much. Hope you'll stick
22 around for the next panel.

23 And Ms. Easley, can you
24 please call the next panel.

1 THE CLERK: Robert
2 Harris, Vice-President, AFSCME D.C.
3 47; Elizabeth Gardner, Library
4 Supervisor at the Fishtown
5 Community Library; Margaret
6 Triandafyllis Library Supervisor.
7 at Charles Santore Library;
8 Elizabeth Maher, Library
9 Supervisor, Interlibrary Loan
10 Department at the Parkway Central
11 Library; Elizabeth Kenny, Library
12 Supervisor at Bustleton Library,
13 and Brett Bessler, Vice-President,
14 Local 21.

15 (Witnesses approached
16 witness table.)

17 COUNCILWOMAN LANDAU:
18 Thank you all so much for being
19 here. We're excited to hear your
20 expertise. We thought it was very
21 important to get as much
22 information as we could from the
23 previous panel. And just a
24 reminder, we do have to be out of

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1 here at 1:00, but we can't wait to
2 hear from you.

3 And please, first person
4 to testify please state your name
5 for the record and proceed.

6 MR. HARRIS: Robert
7 Harris, Vice-President, Legislative
8 Director, AFSCME District Council
9 47. Good morning, Vice-Chair
10 Landau, Chair Phillips, Committee
11 members, and the Philadelphia
12 public. I'm just going to say
13 Councilmember Young now since it's
14 only three of them today. I have
15 members with me who serve as
16 library supervisors from various
17 libraries in Philadelphia as well
18 as the Vice-President and Business
19 Agent of our First-Level
20 Supervisors Local, Local 2186,
21 Brett Bessler.

22 Today we're going to
23 discuss HVAC issues across the Free
24 Library system. There is no

1 surprise to anybody in attendance
2 today that there is infrastructure
3 issues, right, in many of the aging
4 facilities that the city owns,
5 including our libraries. We
6 appreciate the 5.5 million in
7 proposed HVAC improvements for
8 Fiscal Year '27 to start to address
9 these issues as well as the 39
10 million for Fiscal Year '27 to '32
11 in the capital program recommended
12 for improvements to library
13 facilities.

14 We appreciate the
15 strategic goal of developing a
16 comprehensive plan to assess
17 management systems, to enhance
18 cleanliness, to enhance our indoor
19 air quality ensuring reliable
20 operations, to reduce service
21 disruptions and to create a
22 healthier, more compliant
23 environment for the patron and
24 staff.

1 We are aware that
2 between the Councilmembers,
3 employees in the community groups
4 and Administration are all aware of
5 these surrounding issues. We thank
6 City Councilmembers who have
7 aggressively questioned Library
8 leadership during budget hearings,
9 especially Councilmember Young and
10 Councilmember Landau's line of
11 questioning around the full
12 assessment of library facility
13 issues.

14 But my members in the
15 communities they serve are
16 concerned that the Administration's
17 plan is stuck on reactive measures
18 instead of proactive planning to
19 address the conditions that our
20 communities and employees endure,
21 especially during the extreme
22 weather months. The Union and the
23 City Administration have negotiated
24 on a policy that I have shared with

1 the Councilmembers to ensure
2 comfortable environment for all
3 city employees working inside city-
4 owned or leased buildings.

5 It is a standard used to
6 keep our employees safe, because
7 all employees should be able to
8 feel safe at work. When conditions
9 linger outside of the agreed-upon
10 parameters, employees should be
11 reassigned to different library
12 locations. We have received
13 multiple reports from our members
14 that in some cases this does not
15 occur, and I'm sure that our
16 dedicated librarians and staff
17 often stick it out in order to
18 continue to provide the services
19 and programming to the communities
20 that they deeply care about.

21 President and Director
22 of the Free Library of Philadelphia
23 Kelly Richards has been accessible
24 to our President April Giggetts

1 when environmental issues
2 surrounding members at FLP do land
3 on her desk. You will hear today
4 how our members are on the front
5 lines of receiving complaints from
6 community members who use the
7 public libraries, and they do
8 report these issues to management.

9 We hope that with our
10 testimony today we will continue to
11 open doors for stronger
12 collaboration with City Council and
13 the FLP administration in our joint
14 goal to strengthen environmental
15 safety in all of the branches of
16 the Free Library for the benefit of
17 the workers and our community. We
18 thank you for the opportunity to
19 hear us today.

20 COUNCILWOMAN LANDAU:

21 Thank you.

22 Please state your name
23 for the record and proceed with
24 your testimony.

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1 MS. GARDNER: My name is
2 Elizabeth Gardner. I'm a Library
3 Supervisor at the Fishtown
4 location. Good morning,
5 Councilmembers and the viewing
6 public. Thank you for this
7 opportunity to speak today. My
8 name is Liz. I'm a Library
9 Supervisor. I've been with the
10 library for 10 years, now over 10
11 years.

12 As a supervisor on site,
13 I take very seriously my
14 responsibility for not only the
15 building but the staff that work
16 with me and the public that use our
17 facilities, in addition to
18 everything inside the building that
19 is so precious to us. I'd like to
20 take this time today to tell you a
21 story about my library.

22 On July 5, 2024 the
23 Fishtown Community Library's summer
24 program is in full swing. There's

1 a teen video game event happening
2 this afternoon at 3 o'clock. The
3 only problem is that the library's
4 third floor where this event is set
5 to take place is at 82% humidity.
6 This is a healthy humidity level
7 for a well-functioning rain forest,
8 but disastrous for a library.

9 After weeks of this high
10 humidity, which is caused by a lack
11 of dehumidification components in
12 the HVAC system, the pages of our
13 books are beginning to curl. The
14 building smells like damp earth.
15 There are several sinister dark
16 splotches on the carpet near the
17 public computers and in the
18 children's area where babies and
19 toddlers often play.

20 Mold blooms on an office
21 wall. Multiple staff complain of
22 respiratory issues and skin
23 irritation. There are promises of
24 a fix soon, always soon. Since

1 air-conditioning season began,
2 staff have been submitting building
3 service requests. They have been
4 escalating to supervisors, and then
5 to the supervisors of supervisors,
6 and sending evidence of the
7 problems to library management.

8 Workers take it upon
9 themselves to create a spreadsheet
10 tracking that daily temperature and
11 humidity. I looked back at this
12 spreadsheet before today's
13 testimony. The spreadsheet shows
14 that the Fishtown Library had
15 humidity levels above 55%, which is
16 the percentage which mold growth
17 can activate. For 90% of the days
18 in June and July 2024, humidity was
19 above 70% more than half of the
20 time.

21 After months of
22 uncomfortable and concerning
23 environmental conditions, hours
24 upon hours of staff time

1 documenting and escalating the
2 problem and multiple closures to
3 the public, portable dehumidifiers
4 are provided to the library. So
5 now multiple times a day, staff
6 struggle to remove and carry these
7 catch trays containing gallons of
8 water each and then dumping them in
9 custodial closets or outside. This
10 takes time out of the staff's work
11 day and increases trip, slip and
12 fall hazards.

13 The vibrating hum of
14 these five dehumidifiers resonates
15 through the library. It's an
16 annoyance, but it's outweighed by
17 the mitigated threat of mold,
18 respiratory distress and damage to
19 the library's books and equipment.
20 Staff do get some relief in heating
21 season when the HVAC system is
22 cooking moisture out of the air.
23 If I had more time, I'd tell you
24 about how the library's second

1 floor bakes with heat of 85 degrees
2 and above in the winter.

3 In late spring 2025, the
4 heat switches off. The high
5 humidity returns and the cycle
6 continues. Then in December 2025,
7 the HVAC upgrade that had been
8 promised finally begins, a year
9 behind schedule. So this is my
10 library's HVAC story. And as a
11 location that fought and won an
12 intensive renovation, we're one of
13 the lucky ones. This year we'll
14 finally be able to function without
15 the stress of an uncomfortable and
16 unhealthy workplace.

17 It took every ounce of
18 patience, determination and the
19 inability to accept the word no to
20 be able to secure the upgrades that
21 were necessary for years.
22 Advocating for solutions to
23 persistent HVAC-related issues in
24 just one library location could be

1 a full-time job. And indeed it
2 took my focus away from the work
3 that I love and the work that I
4 feel called to do.

5 I cannot overstate the
6 stress, fear, concern, frustration
7 and the severe hit to morale and
8 trust that the chronic inability to
9 fix these problems and even to
10 provide timely short-term solutions
11 to the problems has caused me and
12 the staff and their community. I
13 hope you never need to tell a
14 parent or a caregiver that the
15 carpet is not safe to play on
16 because we don't know what that
17 strange dark spot is and we've been
18 denied a mold test.

19 I hope you never need to
20 put your plans for community
21 events, special activities and your
22 own professional development on the
23 backburner because you need to run
24 around dumping gallons of water

1 from dehumidifiers, keeping close
2 track of temperatures and humidity
3 readings and writing emails and
4 making phone calls over and over
5 again, begging for your building's
6 needs to be addressed.

7 I couldn't do my best
8 work these past two years and I
9 sacrificed the level of community
10 service excellence to which I
11 strive to advocate for bare minimum
12 health, safety and comfort in a
13 critical public space. There are
14 numerous other buildings that need
15 upgrades to their critical
16 infrastructure and we're just one
17 of many. And I think we all agree
18 that it's too many.

19 What is being
20 prioritized over safe, functional
21 and reliable city buildings? Our
22 workforce deserves better. Our
23 communities need better, and I'm
24 asking you to please help us get

1 there. One comment that I have
2 after hearing the testimony of
3 Library administration is that I'm
4 not afraid to say that I don't
5 think we have enough staff to offer
6 robust service.

7 There's a difference
8 between being fully staffed
9 according to the allocation and
10 being robustly staffed and doing
11 our best for our communities. And
12 I'm also not afraid to say that we
13 do need more investment in our
14 buildings to be able to function.
15 Thank you so much.

16 (Applause.)

17 COUNCILWOMAN LANDAU:

18 Thank you very much. We're going
19 to ask any questions or comments
20 afterwards.

21 Please state your name
22 for the record and proceed with
23 your testimony.

24 MS. TRIANDAFYLLIS: Good

1 morning. My name is Margaret
2 Triandafyllis and I'm the Branch
3 manager at the Charles Santore
4 Library in South Philly. We are
5 one of the busiest libraries in the
6 Free Library system, with high
7 circulation numbers and strong
8 program attendance. We play a
9 vital role in our community.

10 Since January 2025
11 however, our ability to provide
12 consistent service has been
13 severely impacted by repeated
14 building system failures, resulting
15 in closures totaling more than five
16 months. In January 2025, we were
17 closed to the public for three
18 weeks while waiting for the
19 delivery of a part to fix our
20 boiler.

21 This past summer our
22 HVAC system failed completely,
23 which meant that we had no central
24 air-conditioning from May through

1 September 2025. Since we did not
2 have an operable cooling system in
3 mid-June, large portable units were
4 installed in an effort to keep us
5 open to the public. These units
6 were a tripping hazard for the
7 public and our staff, and did not
8 work well enough to ensure
9 comfortable temperatures during
10 extreme heat.

11 Following the comfort
12 index guidelines outlined by our
13 library management, we closed on
14 days when temperatures exceeded a
15 certain threshold. Between May and
16 August, we were closed for a total
17 of 171 hours to the public, which
18 is roughly 25 days, forcing us to
19 cancel the majority of our summer
20 programming. In late July, we were
21 told that the procedure for closing
22 libraries had changed and that a
23 city risk management team would
24 have to investigate the conditions.

1 Risk management came out
2 on several occasions, but despite
3 the fact that building temps were
4 in the '90s, we were not allowed to
5 close because we were told that we
6 weren't in imminent health danger.
7 This decision exposed both staff
8 and the public to periods of
9 extreme heat inside a public
10 facility.

11 The condition of our
12 HVAC system was well-known to
13 property management prior to its
14 failure, and we had been on a list
15 of libraries that were scheduled
16 for HVAC replacement. However, the
17 money for the project was not
18 encumbered until April 2025 and
19 construction did not begin until
20 November 2025. The library then
21 closed again from December 1, 2025
22 through February 17, 2026 to
23 complete the work.

24 We have received a lot

1 of community support and the public
2 is thrilled when we reopen, but the
3 closures are disruptive for
4 residents who rely on the library
5 for internet access, cooling during
6 extreme heat, educational
7 programming and community
8 engagement. I urge City Council to
9 prioritize preventative maintenance
10 and capital fundings so libraries
11 can stay open and safe. Thank you.

12 COUNCILWOMAN LANDAU:

13 Thank you all very much. I have
14 one question I chose not to ask the
15 Administration because I wanted to
16 ask you, which is it's about
17 communication with the work orders.

18 Are you following up and
19 being communicated to simply by
20 email or is there a computer
21 program, a database where you're
22 able to see the process and the
23 progress of the work orders?

24 MS. GARDNER: So there

1 is a computerized system where we
2 can submit service requests. It's
3 called the Building Service Request
4 system, the BSR system. I think
5 many of us here have submitted
6 dozens, maybe hundreds of BSRs
7 during our career. I personally
8 have found that there can be a
9 quick response to BSRs and there
10 can be robust notes left in the
11 system, and we will get notified by
12 email when those updates are made.
13 Some BSRs though do languish for
14 months, if not years, at a time
15 without communication. It really
16 can depend.

17 COUNCILWOMAN LANDAU: I
18 couldn't help when I was hearing
19 the previous testimony about
20 thinking about the bad landlord.
21 You're reporting over and over
22 again a health and safety crisis
23 and the bad landlord is ignoring
24 you, and really hoping that that is

1 not what's happening and also not
2 communicating with you.

3 I just want to also ask
4 a question for the Santore Library.
5 I got a lot of complaints about
6 that library, which is when I
7 started to call the Administration
8 last year, which is when I learned
9 that they hired somebody who would
10 be overseeing all of building
11 maintenance and doing this
12 assessment, which I was told was
13 going to happen to all libraries.
14 I thought pretty quickly. I didn't
15 know it was going to be an
16 extensive, detailed system that
17 would only produce 10 libraries
18 that's been concluded to then have
19 to do the work.

20 Is Santore fully fixed
21 now? They told me they were
22 waiting on a part.

23 MS. TRIANDAFYLLIS: The
24 HVAC system has been fully fixed

1 and it's a brand new HVAC system
2 now. We did have a recent closure
3 because our boiler failed, so we
4 waited for another week or so for a
5 part to be delivered. But as far
6 as I know, everything is fully
7 fixed. However, we were not one of
8 the libraries that had this
9 comprehensive assessment.

10 COUNCILWOMAN LANDAU:

11 Thank you. Does anybody have --
12 yes. The Chair recognizes
13 Councilmember Jay Young for a
14 question.

15 COUNCILMAN YOUNG: Thank
16 you. So often our library staff
17 are expected, you got to hold the
18 libraries together. You're the
19 public-facing mission on the
20 libraries, like when you're asleep
21 essentially. But even when the
22 building is failing, even when it's
23 all this stuff, even when it's 85
24 degrees here and mold on the

1 ground, you still got to do your
2 job while you're dumping buckets
3 out, right. So how does that
4 affect the staff morale, the
5 retention, right, the trust and the
6 quality of service that you're able
7 to provide to the residents of the
8 city?

9 MS. TRIANDAFYLLIS:

10 Yeah. I think we sometimes feel
11 between a rock and a hard place,
12 right, because so many of us feel
13 deeply dedicated. And it can be
14 hard to find the balance between
15 when do we stay and tough it out to
16 try to do the best for our
17 community and when is enough. It
18 can be very embarrassing when the
19 public comes into the building and
20 the conditions are not adequate and
21 having to try to explain
22 professionally what the problem is.

23 I think many of us have
24 done a little bit too much bending

1 over backwards to make things work.
2 And in the case of Santore, I know
3 that our Vice-President Brett will
4 get to this, but I attended a labor
5 management meeting from the Santore
6 Library last summer and the heat
7 was about 93 degrees in the meeting
8 room. And we sat there on Zoom
9 with management who did not attend
10 that meeting with us and we're
11 sweating and feeling faint, and the
12 staff were not dismissed for the
13 day. So there's times when we need
14 to go, but we're denied that
15 choice.

16 COUNCILMAN YOUNG: Thank
17 you.

18 COUNCILWOMAN LANDAU:
19 Okay. Thank you. We're going to
20 have the rest of your panel please
21 testify and then if there's any
22 additional questions, we'll ask
23 then. Thank you.

24 Good afternoon,

1 everyone. Please state your name
2 for the record and proceed with
3 your testimony.

4 MS. MAHER: Hello. My
5 name is Elizabeth Maher. I work as
6 the Library Supervisor, one of the
7 Interlibrary Loan Department, which
8 is --

9 COUNCILWOMAN LANDAU:
10 I'm sorry. Can you speak into the
11 microphone and start over.

12 MS. MAHER: Got it.

13 COUNCILWOMAN LANDAU: Or
14 you could pull that closer to you
15 as well.

16 MS. MAHER: Hello. My
17 name is Elizabeth Maher, and I work
18 as the Library Supervisor, one of
19 the Interlibrary Loan Department at
20 the Parkway Central Library. I've
21 been working in this department for
22 a year now and I've been
23 communicating with management
24 regarding heat and humidity issues

1 the entire time.

2 The room where we work
3 was designed for storage but was
4 reworked for interlibrary loan in
5 2008. During the move, ventilation
6 and temperature regulation were not
7 considered, which is very clear by
8 the chicken wire that we have in
9 place of walls and the frequent
10 overheating. During the summer,
11 the space is hot and humid. And
12 during the winter, the space is hot
13 and dry.

14 The air-conditioning for
15 the building only reaches our
16 department when it's on full blast,
17 which effectively freezes at least
18 two other departments. During the
19 winter, the heat reaches us very
20 easily. Many departments on the
21 east side and the ground floor of
22 the building feel the heat from the
23 boiler radiating through the walls,
24 again without regulation.

1 The Free Library of
2 Philadelphia is required to lend
3 items to the best of our ability to
4 other libraries in the state of
5 Pennsylvania, and this is one of
6 the services that Interlibrary Loan
7 provides. Throughout this winter,
8 staff have redeployed numerous
9 times, borrowing spaces in various
10 departments, attempting to continue
11 the state-mandated work as well as
12 to fill requests for Philadelphia
13 patrons.

14 However, it is difficult
15 to complete our work when staff are
16 in separate areas and some are cut
17 off from the central software that
18 only lives on our computers.
19 Because we would continue to return
20 to the space to ensure that
21 services do not pause, staff have
22 developed nosebleeds, persistent
23 coughs, migraines and other effects
24 of dehydration.

1 To combat the unbearable
2 temperatures and humidity, we have
3 three standing fans, two desk fans,
4 three standing humidifiers and two
5 desk humidifiers. Two of the
6 standing fans were in the office
7 when I arrived and a third was
8 provided by management over the
9 summer. I ordered the standing
10 humidifiers on December 3, 2025 and
11 the space was consistently below
12 20% relative humidity. The order
13 was expedited and arrived three
14 months later on March 3rd.

15 While we awaited their
16 arrival, I purchased desk
17 humidifiers with my own funds. The
18 space is still too hot and
19 impossible to regulate. We no
20 longer have any open outlets or
21 space to put any more equipment.
22 Luckily, I am now working with
23 management to move our department
24 to another area of the building,

1 but HVAC failures will continue to
2 affect us.

3 We send materials to
4 nearly every branch library and
5 serve patrons all over the city.
6 We must keep track of which
7 libraries are closed due to HVAC
8 failures, ensuring that we send
9 materials to open locations instead
10 and that patrons know where to find
11 their requests. We are preparing
12 now for the closures of branches
13 that don't have consistent
14 air-conditioning during the summer
15 heat. We receive calls and emails
16 from patrons frustrated that they
17 cannot visit their local library to
18 pick up or return items, which we
19 all know is only one facet of what
20 libraries do for the community.
21 The people of Philadelphia deserve
22 consistent library services that
23 are not subject to the
24 irregularities of the weather.

1 Thank you.

2 COUNCILWOMAN LANDAU:

3 Thank you very much.

4 Please proceed.

5 MS. KENNY: My name is
6 Elizabeth Kenny. I have been
7 Library Supervisor I at Bustleton
8 Library for six years. During the
9 past few years, we have experienced
10 regular HVAC issues. Just last
11 year, during the months of June,
12 July, and August, Bustleton Library
13 only had AC for three weeks, from
14 July 9th to the 29th. The AC was
15 fixed again and working by
16 September 9th because we are
17 expecting a boiler replacement in
18 the fall and wouldn't have our heat
19 turned on as scheduled.

20 Turning off the AC got
21 lost in the shuffle and we ended up
22 with AC still on until November
23 4th, as the weather continued to
24 cool throughout the fall and the

1 boiler installation wasn't
2 completed. The branch was finally
3 closed for about two weeks in
4 mid-November when we were reporting
5 a branch temp of 52 degrees with no
6 heat.

7 The boiler installation
8 was completed and staff were able
9 to return to the building on
10 November 24th. Currently, the
11 boiler works great, but we do not
12 have functioning thermostats. For
13 the heat, there are two
14 thermostats. The thermostat for
15 our baseboard never kicks the heat
16 on, and the thermostat for our air
17 handler never shuts off.

18 Previous to July 2025
19 when temperatures would be outside
20 of the comfort index, staff would
21 be able to redeploy to a branch
22 with comfortable internal
23 temperature. After changes in how
24 branch closures are handled due to

1 HVAC issues were implemented last
2 summer, we were given fans and
3 dehumidifiers and made to work in a
4 building with no AC for the entire
5 month of August, except one day.

6 There was a recent warm
7 Monday in March, the high for the
8 day was recorded as 68. But
9 because of the ineffective
10 thermostats, the internal
11 temperature in the building when we
12 entered was 85. We were told that
13 if staff are uncomfortable, they
14 can take sick time. But they
15 aren't sick, they are being told to
16 work in an unsafe environment.

17 Bustleton has robust
18 programming. But even though we
19 were open, much of it was canceled
20 last summer. It would have been
21 unsafe to continue hosting chair
22 yoga with a lot of seniors, and our
23 summer English classes refused to
24 start until we had functioning AC.

1 Whether we were open or not, a
2 minimum of five programs a week
3 were canceled in all of August.

4 Bustleton Library's HVAC
5 system, despite appreciated recent
6 updates, still does not
7 sufficiently heat and cool our
8 building at all appropriate times.
9 And despite forcing staff to work
10 in an unsafe environment so our
11 stats can say we are open, we still
12 have to greatly reduce services
13 during these uncomfortable and
14 unsafe temperature periods. Thank
15 you.

16 COUNCILWOMAN LANDAU:

17 Thank you very much.

18 MR. BESSLER: All right.
19 Good afternoon. My name is Brett
20 Bessler. I'm the Vice-President
21 and Business Agent for AFSCME
22 District Council 47 Local 2186. In
23 my capacity as Business Agent for
24 the Local, one of my assigned

1 departments is the Free Library of
2 Philadelphia.

3 Before I really start to
4 dive into it, I do want to thank
5 all of our Local 2186 members that
6 came today. Our Local 2186 members
7 in the Free Library of Philadelphia
8 are some of the most dedicated
9 civil servants you'll ever meet.
10 They're some of the most dedicated
11 union members you'll ever meet, and
12 I know every day that I go to work
13 they make sure that I'm the most
14 dedicated union representative that
15 I can be.

16 So I know that
17 management has a tendency to dance
18 around questions, right. I mean, I
19 think that you were asking some yes
20 or no questions earlier and you
21 weren't getting a yes or a no. So
22 for the question of is this the
23 allocated funds for the capital
24 budget, is it enough. No. Do we

1 need more funds for operating
2 budget, yes.

3 How many closures,
4 Councilmember Jeffrey Young, that
5 was a great question. You asked
6 over the past two years I believe.
7 I personally don't have that data.
8 Knowing what this hearing was
9 about, I can't believe that
10 management didn't come with that
11 data, respectfully for you all.
12 But I can tell you that there was a
13 WHYY article that was published on
14 October 1 of 2025, so last fall,
15 that said that 31 out of the 54
16 neighborhood library branches were
17 closed over the summer, just the
18 summer, due to HVAC issues. So
19 effectively, over 50% of our
20 libraries closed last summer due to
21 HVAC issues.

22 So as you heard from our
23 dedicated members today, it's
24 evident that there's a significant

1 problem within the Free Library
2 Philadelphia facility systemwide.
3 You only heard from a few of our
4 members today, but I promise you
5 there's many, many more that are
6 experiencing these kind of issues.
7 I myself was with Margaret and Liz
8 at the Santore branch last summer
9 when temperatures were reaching
10 90-plus degrees inside.

11 As Liz said, we
12 conducted a virtual labor
13 management meeting on site. We
14 invited management, come on down,
15 check it out for yourself. They
16 didn't come on down and check it
17 out for themselves. We were
18 sweating profusely. We were
19 surrounded by these portable AC
20 units that just weren't cutting it
21 and we were practically just
22 begging for the Free Library of
23 Philadelphia and the City of
24 Philadelphia to keep our members

1 and the patrons that they serve
2 safe.

3 Candidly, what was going
4 on at Santore last summer, the City
5 of Philadelphia should be
6 embarrassed by it. These portable
7 AC units, they have to run these
8 condensation lines, they're taking
9 up sinks, they're creating tripping
10 hazards. I think there was about
11 four or five of them throughout the
12 branch. It was still high 80s, 90
13 degrees. It's embarrassing. We
14 were in there for hours and hours.
15 Maybe two patrons came in.

16 And I remember one
17 family came in. They made it maybe
18 like 10 feet into the building,
19 they walked right out. We can't
20 accept this. We just cannot accept
21 this. And we shouldn't just hang
22 on to say that we're keeping a
23 library open. So maybe it's 30
24 branches over the summer that

1 closed instead of 31. We have to
2 address the problem, not just keep
3 kicking it down the road for days
4 and days.

5 That Santore branch
6 remained open despite unhealthy
7 conditions. And eventually after
8 having to endure unsafe conditions
9 for an extended period of time, the
10 branch was closed and repairs were
11 finally set in motion. This
12 happens far, far too often. The
13 union, our members and residents
14 find ourselves in this position
15 now, having to foot the bill for
16 decades of underfunding and
17 neglect.

18 Routine and preventative
19 maintenance has been deferred,
20 fixes with duct tape and bubble gum
21 performed over and over, and
22 stretching sometimes
23 half-a-century-plus old HVAC
24 systems to their absolute limit

1 until it all falls apart. My
2 air-conditioner, my central AC unit
3 broke last summer. That was not
4 fun. Had someone come out and I
5 said, hey, if I get a new unit, how
6 long is it going to last. And he
7 said, I'll be honest with you,
8 these new units you're lucky if
9 you're going to get 10 years out of
10 it. So it kind of puts a
11 perspective on what we'll be
12 looking at in the future.

13 But as I said, these
14 systemic issues have escalated due
15 to decades of neglect. And I do
16 believe that it's important to
17 acknowledge that there's no one in
18 this room today that is solely
19 responsible for the current state
20 of these HVAC systems throughout
21 the Free Library of Philadelphia.
22 This has been happening since the
23 '80s, far back as the '70s. But
24 what we are responsible for is what

1 we're going to do right now and in
2 the future.

3 It's fantastic that
4 we're seeing more capital funds
5 dedicated to HVAC repairs
6 throughout FLP, but that's just
7 step one. We need a full
8 assessment of all the FLP locations
9 and action plan and accountability
10 to actually spend these new
11 allocated funds. We need to invest
12 not only in major system overhauls,
13 but preventative maintenance and
14 the staff that perform the work.
15 We don't constantly have to
16 contract out this work. That's
17 only going to cost more over time
18 when you have to constantly be
19 putting out bids and all that fun
20 stuff.

21 And we cannot fall into
22 the same traps that previous
23 administrations have fallen into,
24 where we replace these systems, we

1 come out, we have a ribbon-cutting,
2 everybody claps their hands, you
3 hand the keys over to the
4 supervisor and then you're gone,
5 and you just forget about it until
6 50 years later and the system
7 fails, right. We should be doing
8 routine assessment, routine
9 preventative maintenance.

10 You can think about it
11 like a car. You could go to a
12 dealership today, buy a brand new
13 car with zero miles on it. If you
14 don't change your oil, that car is
15 going to be gone in about a year
16 and a half, right. To that end,
17 the union's requesting that we
18 continue this conversation through
19 an established working group with
20 Free Library Philadelphia, District
21 Council 47 and City Councilmembers.

22 Through this working
23 group, we can get to the root cause
24 of these systemic issues, develop a

1 plan and ensure accountability that
2 appropriated funds are utilized in
3 a timely and efficient manner.
4 We've seen progress with similar
5 working groups in the recent past.
6 I know Councilman Phillips knows
7 I'm going to mention the PPR
8 working group that we've
9 participated in over the last year,
10 you know, hoping to produce some
11 results. We have a plan. It's
12 about accountability.

13 I think one of the best
14 things through that working group
15 is Parks & Rec HR management
16 actually said to one of our
17 executive board members, I can't
18 believe the union's actually
19 sticking up for us a little bit.
20 And you know it is true because
21 again, this is a lot of these
22 things, they aren't our fault,
23 right.

24 It's decades and decades

1 of neglect. But we also recognize
2 that this will take time, right.
3 We're not irrational. We're not
4 unrealistic. We know that some
5 projects are just going to take
6 time, but we want to have goals, we
7 want to have the ability to hold
8 these people accountable, right.
9 And we can't do that unless we have
10 in-depth conversations and dialogue
11 about these issues. So really we
12 hope that you consider our request
13 so we can continue to collaborate
14 for the common good of our
15 membership and all Philadelphians
16 at-large. Thank you.

17 COUNCILWOMAN LANDAU:
18 Thank you all so much. I really
19 want to speak to the library staff
20 themselves, supervisors and line
21 staff. You guys are amazing. It
22 looks sounds like you're working
23 against very difficult odds and
24 circumstances. And thank you for

1 just continuing to advocate and to
2 stand up for your members and to
3 stand up for your colleagues.

4 We will do everything we
5 possibly can to continue making
6 sure that you're working in healthy
7 environments. I absolutely am all
8 for a working group. I think it's
9 the only way that we can get this.
10 Everybody has to be at the table at
11 the same time. If not, then the
12 question is what conversation
13 happened or didn't happen, so we
14 will definitely get back to you.
15 Very interested.

16 I would like to call on
17 Councilmember Jeffrey Young for
18 some questions.

19 COUNCILMAN YOUNG: Thank
20 you. Just one question. When
21 these libraries close and the
22 library system knows that it's
23 going to take months for some of
24 the repairs to take place, do they

1 offer any of the libraries like a
2 temporary space in order to
3 maintain some level of service?

4 MR. BESSLER: I mean, if
5 there's going to be a full closure,
6 no, nothing like that happens.

7 When a closure happens, staff will
8 get redeployed to another branch.

9 I will kind of on that note,
10 Councilmember, I've always found it
11 a little bit absurd that sometimes
12 when we experience these HVAC
13 issues and we have high 80s or
14 really cold temperatures down in
15 the 50s, they'll close the branch
16 so patrons can't visit, but they
17 keep our members inside so people
18 can come drop off their books
19 and/or pick up new books. So
20 they're saying it's not safe for
21 anybody else, but our members can't
22 get redeployed, so I don't know.
23 Would you stand in a burning
24 building and believe that it was

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1 safe.

2 COUNCILMAN YOUNG: Thank
3 you. That's the only question I
4 had.

5 COUNCILWOMAN LANDAU:
6 Chair recognizes Councilmember
7 Anthony Phillips.

8 MR. BESSLER: I'm sorry.
9 On that, materials pick-up is what
10 I was referring to and that counts
11 towards hours open. So it's all
12 about the --

13 COUNCILMAN YOUNG: They
14 don't even count the materials
15 pick-up days as the branch being
16 closed. So that's not even counted
17 in their system?

18 MR. BESSLER: No.

19 COUNCILMAN YOUNG: Wow.
20 Okay. Thank you.

21 COUNCILMAN PHILLIPS: I
22 just want to say thank you. Your
23 testimony today did not go
24 unnoticed or unheard. It is

1 incredibly important and I love
2 working in the working group. We
3 just had -- I think some meaningful
4 results are going to come from it,
5 and we're going to -- hopefully we
6 can work together to make sure that
7 this happens as well because it's
8 mind-boggling how long it takes.

9 And a lot of it has to
10 do with not just funding because
11 funding is definitely needed.
12 Don't get me wrong. We're going to
13 need to push for that, but it's
14 also just simple competencies,
15 right, just knowing that
16 something's not making sense with
17 how long something's taking to get
18 to somebody, and responses to
19 inquiries around your building
20 should happen right away, within 24
21 hours. A lot of spaces even say no
22 more than 48 we won't get back to
23 you. If it's emergency, call this
24 number. So some things need to

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1 change. So thank you so much.

2 MR. BESSLER: Thanks.

3 COUNCILWOMAN LANDAU:

4 Thank you.

5 Ms. Easley, will you
6 call the next panel of witnesses.

7 THE CLERK: Vanesse
8 Lloyd-Sgambati, founder of the
9 African American Children's Book
10 Project; Dawn Hannah, Chief Program
11 and Impact Officer, Beyond
12 Literacy; and Angela Crumdy,
13 Director of Programs and Research
14 at Barbershop Books.

15 (Witnesses approached
16 witness table.)

17 COUNCILWOMAN LANDAU:
18 Good afternoon, everybody. Please
19 state your name for the record and
20 proceed with your testimony.
21 Reminder, unfortunately, we have to
22 be out of here at 1:00 and there
23 are some people signed up for
24 public comment. So thank you.

1 MS. LLOYD-SGAMBATI:

2 Vanesse Lloyd-Sgambati, founder of
3 the African American Children's
4 Book Project and the Literary Media
5 and Publishing Consultants.

6 MS. HANNAH: Dawn
7 Hannah, Chief Program and Impact
8 Officer at Beyond Literacy.

9 COUNCILWOMAN LANDAU:
10 Can you state your name again for
11 the record just so the stenographer
12 can get it. Thank you.

13 MS. HANNAH: Dawn
14 Hannah.

15 MS. CRUMDY: Angela
16 Crumdy, Director of Programs and
17 Research for Barbershop Books.

18 MS. LLOYD-SGAMBATI: I
19 just want to say, before I start my
20 presentation, I am a literary
21 consultant and curator. And I've
22 heard the testimony. And it is a
23 hit side and there's a flip side,
24 but I wanted to also acknowledge

1 the current Administration. As a
2 literary consultant who works with
3 people all over the country doing
4 projects that promote literacy, but
5 also empower, enrich, and enlighten
6 all children, this current
7 Administration is the only one that
8 has reached out to do partnerships
9 with me here in Philadelphia.

10 But I also want to
11 acknowledge that I was at the
12 Chestnut Hill Library and we were
13 doing a book event, and they had no
14 heat in the other rooms of the
15 library. So there's two sides to
16 all of that and I'm sure that City
17 Council will find a way to work it
18 out, but they are working closely.

19 In fact, we have a
20 promotion so anybody who's here, go
21 to the website in celebration of
22 Global Heritage Month. We're doing
23 a series of programming with
24 cookbook authors celebrating

1 Jamaican, Chinese, Puerto Rican,
2 and Somalian cuisine. So please
3 come out and support that. But I
4 was called upon to make a
5 presentation and everybody of my
6 generation has a library story.

7 And mine goes back to,
8 well, probably before most of you
9 were born, keeping it real. I grew
10 up in Southwest Philadelphia, in an
11 area called Elmwood. It was rural,
12 we'd have sidewalks and some
13 streets we didn't have light. And
14 they used to call us swamp foxes
15 when we went to school because we
16 were surrounded by swamps. We used
17 to have these drills that they
18 would say, stop, drop and go under
19 your desk, because the Russians are
20 coming.

21 And after two times of
22 stopping and dropping and getting
23 my knees scuffed up, I asked my
24 teacher, what is the reason we are

1 doing this because I am way over
2 this? She replied -- she didn't
3 know but she said, why don't you go
4 to the library and get a book about
5 the children of Moscow and about
6 Russia. We did not have a school
7 library nor did we have a community
8 library. What we had was a
9 bookmobile that came around every
10 other week and you could take out
11 two books. And I am one of eight
12 and my parents were ferocious
13 readers and we looked forward to
14 going to these outings.

15 So I went into the
16 library bookmobile and I said, I
17 want books on Russia. And she
18 looked at me as she squinted, I can
19 still see her face, like why would
20 a little Black girl from the swamps
21 want a book on Russia. I had a
22 curiosity. We didn't have those
23 types of books in my school. We
24 didn't have those types of books in

1 my community. So I took out two
2 books and I can still see the book
3 on Moscow. It was a Time-Life
4 pictorial book.

5 And so, as I walked out
6 of the bookmobile, the kids started
7 laughing at me. They said, that's
8 stupid, you would take out books on
9 Moscow, you're never going to go
10 there, why would you want to read
11 something about the children from a
12 place you're never going to see.

13 My dad said, never mind,
14 keep reading. And it developed in
15 me a passion, a passion to find out
16 about people beyond the boundaries
17 of my community. I took out books
18 on Paris, Rome, London, Istanbul.
19 It was like a challenge for me to
20 see how many of those places I
21 could read about. Well, I went to
22 Moscow about 10 years ago. And as
23 I'm standing in the Red Square, I
24 start to identify every building in

1 that square and the travel guide
2 said, how do you know so much about
3 my country? I said, I read it in a
4 book.

5 So libraries are not
6 just to take out books, they're not
7 just social services. They're
8 places where people can discover
9 their passion and I had a passion
10 for travel. I've been to every
11 country in Western Europe. I've
12 been to Eastern Europe, North
13 Africa, South America and a host of
14 places here in the United States.
15 And many of those places I saw
16 before I had the opportunity
17 because I had a library.

18 Now, there is a library
19 in Eastwick. And every time I
20 drive past it on my way to the
21 airport, I'm tempted to go into
22 the -- I have a problem with always
23 being just late getting to the
24 airport. But the importance of

1 making sure these libraries, all
2 the things, the elements these
3 people talked about today all have
4 a valid point, and the money is
5 definitely needed.

6 But I took a step
7 further because I am a curator and
8 a consultant to try to shape this
9 whole narrative about the
10 importance of Philadelphia
11 libraries. I checked with
12 libraries, I checked with all the
13 bookstores locally, about 10 of
14 them, both Black and mainstream
15 bookstores, I checked also with
16 libraries within the region and a
17 couple of them in different states
18 because I have relationships and I
19 consult with some of these places.
20 And I asked, do you have any books
21 on Augustus Jackson, the Ice Cream
22 Man? Do you have a book on Philip
23 Freeland? He was an architect. Do
24 you have any books on Mae Reeves?

1 And all of these are
2 important, because many of you know
3 me from the presentation. I kick
4 off Black History Month here in
5 Philadelphia City Council and I
6 bring in those authors and books.
7 These are people who are
8 Philadelphians. Augustus Jackson
9 was called the Ice Cream Man
10 because in 1840s, he created the
11 whole concept of rock salt that you
12 could have a freestanding ice cream
13 store. He was known throughout the
14 region as a man who invented ice
15 cream.

16 Philip Freeland was an
17 architect from Germantown. And
18 what's significant is that he had a
19 reading disability. He was
20 dyslexic. He was one of the people
21 who built the African American
22 Museum in D.C. And Mae Reeves was
23 the toast of the hat world. She
24 used to go to Paris and London to

1 buy the fixtures for her hats, but
2 she was the first Black woman to
3 own a store on South Street as well
4 as to own a store on 60th. Her
5 store is in tomb in the African
6 American Museum in D.C.

7 The Free Library has all
8 of these books. They're giving our
9 children the opportunity to have
10 access to books that reflect their
11 images. And there are many
12 cultures that do have books.
13 People are Asian, people who speak
14 Spanish and a host of other ethnic
15 groups who have the possibilities
16 to go into public libraries to see
17 themselves. Because when you see
18 yourself, you believe that you have
19 the possibility to do well.

20 So I don't want to take
21 up the time of the other people,
22 but I can impress upon you the
23 importance of making sure that the
24 library gets the funding they need

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1 to continue the great work that
2 they're currently doing.

3 (Applause.)

4 COUNCILWOMAN LANDAU:

5 Thank you so much. Really
6 appreciate that.

7 Please proceed.

8 MS. HANNAH: Thank you.

9 Ray, could I ask your help giving
10 this to our Councilmembers? As a
11 woman of a certain age, I know I've
12 given you something you can't
13 possibly see so I have a larger
14 size copy for you.

15 COUNCILWOMAN LANDAU:

16 I'll take it.

17 MS. HANNAH: Thanks for
18 the opportunity to offer my
19 testimony today. Again, my name is
20 Dawn Hannah and I serve as Chief
21 Program and Impact officer at
22 Beyond Literacy or BeLit,
23 Philadelphia's largest provider of
24 free adult education, family

1 literacy and workforce readiness
2 programs.

3 At BeLit, we serve
4 nearly 2000 adults and families
5 every year. The problem is those
6 2000 learners are a mere fraction
7 of the individuals in Philadelphia
8 who need the services that we
9 provide and that, quite frankly, is
10 by design. When we talk about the
11 literacy crisis we're facing today,
12 we're not talking about an
13 individual failure, but about
14 longstanding consequences of
15 generations of systemic
16 underinvestment, instability and
17 inequity.

18 Consider the timeline
19 that I gave you. All in the 1950s
20 we declared segregation
21 unconstitutional, but never fully
22 resourced integration. In the
23 1800s, even before then, education
24 in the country was legally

1 segregated. In 2014,
2 Pennsylvania's funding for
3 education was challenged in court
4 for being inequitable. And in
5 2023, our Supreme Court ruled that
6 our funding system was
7 unconstitutional.

8 Let's sit with that.
9 From 1890 and well before to 2023
10 and well beyond, generation after
11 generation of children were either
12 denied education altogether or
13 educated in underfunded schools,
14 children who became adults and
15 continue to feed the need for adult
16 education today.

17 And so, here we are in
18 2026 still fighting for equitable
19 access in a country where 59
20 million adults have literacy skills
21 at or below level 1, and 33% of
22 those living in poverty have
23 literacy skills at that level.
24 There's no stronger correlation I

1 think I could ever make. You have
2 other data to reflect on. We also
3 live in a state ranked 28th in
4 literacy where more than half of
5 adults demonstrate basic or below
6 basic literacy skills, and in a
7 city ranked next to last in the
8 state, where greater than 140,000
9 adults lack a high school diploma
10 or equivalent. 52% of adults
11 struggle with basic literacy and
12 math skills, and the unemployment
13 rate for those adults is three
14 times higher than other adults
15 functioning at higher levels.

16 In the face of this
17 great need, adult and family
18 literacy funding to support
19 solutions has decreased over time,
20 reflected in that blue line, and
21 remain flat-funded from 2011 until
22 just recently when we received a
23 small bump. The result is
24 decreased access, the orange line

1 diminished returns, because this
2 kind of instability makes it
3 difficult to build consistent long-
4 term pathways for learners.

5 If we're serious about
6 addressing all of these issues,
7 then we have to invest differently.
8 One of the most powerful accessible
9 systems that we already have to
10 invest in is our public libraries.
11 Libraries are not just places where
12 books are stored. Libraries are
13 where early literacy, adult
14 education, digital access and
15 workforce development intersect,
16 where caregivers and children learn
17 side-by-side, where adults gain
18 skills they need to move from
19 learning to livelihood.

20 BeLit used to offer
21 hundreds of classes at libraries,
22 but those offerings have ceased
23 because of lots of what we've been
24 hearing about today, centers that

1 close suddenly, learners and staff
2 can't count on taking the time to
3 get to those libraries and find
4 them open, so their classes are
5 canceled. And what we know in
6 adult ed, if you lose a student one
7 day, they're going to be absent the
8 next. And this is where our crisis
9 gets fed and continues, chronic
10 staffing shortages, site closures.
11 We are asking libraries and the
12 adult education system more broadly
13 to meet the massive needs that I've
14 described with inconsistent and
15 insufficient investment.

16 At BeLit, we've been
17 thinking about this for a long time
18 and we think we have a solution to
19 moving the needle. You all have
20 heard of the SMART Framework,
21 specific measurable, blah, blah
22 blah. We have a new version, which
23 is the BeLit SMART Future
24 Framework. The S is for Sustained

1 investment over time and matching
2 funding to the scale of the need;
3 A, Alignment with workforce and
4 economic priorities; R, Resilient
5 enough to withstand political
6 shifts and ultimately to transform
7 lives.

8 Libraries are not a line
9 item. They are a critical layer of
10 infrastructure for the SMART Future
11 framework, because when adults gain
12 literacy skills, the result is
13 stronger families, stronger
14 workforce participation and
15 children who are more likely to
16 read on grade level and ultimately
17 graduate from high school and go on
18 to post-secondary. Libraries sit
19 at the center of that multi-
20 generational impact. When a book
21 opens, a door opens. And when a
22 door opens for the adult or child
23 caregiver, it opens for the child.
24 That is how lives change and how

1 communities change.

2 As policymakers, your
3 decision shapes the conditions that
4 make change possible. You have the
5 power to fund change. Your call to
6 action is to invest in programs
7 that are accessible, consistently
8 open, air-conditioned, safe and of
9 high quality.

10 Support the full
11 ecosystem, instruction, support
12 services, workforce pathways,
13 commit to long-term stability for
14 our public libraries. They are our
15 partner in the fight for
16 educational access for all. Thank
17 you.

18 MS. CRUMDY: Good
19 afternoon, members of Philadelphia
20 City Council. Again, my name is
21 Dr. Angela Crumdy, and I have the
22 pleasure of serving as the Director
23 of Programs and Research for
24 Barbershop Books. We are a

1 national literacy nonprofit that
2 inspires Black boys and other
3 vulnerable youth to read for fun.

4 Today our local
5 programming supports child-friendly
6 reading spaces in 34 Philadelphia
7 barbershops, serving nearly 4000
8 children every month. With less
9 than 1 in 3 Philadelphia 3rd
10 graders able to read proficiently
11 last school year, it is critical
12 for literacy organizations and
13 community stakeholders to work in
14 tandem to support the city's
15 youngest readers.

16 So Barbershop Books is
17 here today to express our support
18 for Resolution No. 251083, which
19 authorizes hearings to investigate
20 the current conditions and future
21 of Philadelphia's public libraries.
22 At Barbershop Books, we meet
23 children and families wherever they
24 are, whether in libraries,

1 barbershops, schools or shelters.

2 Our positioning of

3 barbers as male reading role models

4 and curating personally meaningful

5 literacy experiences across North,

6 West and South Philadelphia has

7 shown us that when libraries are

8 well-funded, they can help children

9 build positive relationships with

10 reading that extend beyond the

11 walls of the library.

12 Philadelphia's early literacy

13 ecosystem can be strengthened by

14 the Free Library of Philadelphia's

15 leadership and support, enabling

16 literacy organizations like

17 Barbershop Books to deepen our

18 impact and expand our reach.

19 During the summer of

20 2025, we partnered with the

21 Haverford Library branch to pilot

22 an innovative drop-in program

23 called Reading Solid Summer. This

24 program is designed to help

1 children ages 6 to 8 discover what
2 makes reading personally meaningful
3 to them. With the support of
4 engaged librarians, this program
5 allowed elementary school students
6 to develop their reading identity
7 by helping them to explore the
8 everyday choices that readers make
9 about what, when and where they
10 like to read.

11 We believe that
12 attention to the socio-emotional
13 drivers of literacy success, such
14 as agency, motivation and reducing
15 reading trauma are fundamental to
16 developing well-rounded
17 individuals. Through dance
18 parties, picture walks and
19 independent exploration, Haverford
20 Branch librarians helped to bring
21 this program to life for children
22 and their guardians on a weekly
23 basis.

24 This summer we are not

1 continuing this program at
2 Haverford despite the positive
3 feedback we received. We look
4 forward to doing more of this
5 innovative work. However, we
6 understand that constraints around
7 time, personnel, funding and
8 infrastructure currently limit what
9 is possible. As more children face
10 the choice of whether to outsource
11 reading and thinking to artificial
12 intelligence or whether to engage
13 self-directed or adult-assisted
14 literacy experiences, libraries
15 will play a critical role.

16 For programs like
17 Reading So Lit and partnerships
18 like the one between the Free
19 Library and Barbershop Books to
20 flourish, we need facilities that
21 reflect the state-of-the-art,
22 world-class standards Philadelphia
23 residents deserve. Failing
24 facilities disproportionately harm

1 the very communities that rely on
2 libraries the most for digital
3 access and safe afterschool spaces.

4 We urge the Council to
5 move forward with these hearings.
6 A systemwide facilities plan and
7 reconstruction strategy is not just
8 a capital necessity, it is a
9 commitment to the educational and
10 economic future of every
11 neighborhood in Philadelphia.

12 Barbershop Books is proud of the
13 ways we've been able to partner
14 with the Free Library to help
15 fulfill its mission to advance
16 literacy, guide learning and
17 inspire curiosity.

18 However, there's still
19 work to be done to ensure that the
20 youngest and most vulnerable in our
21 community have access to quality
22 education-based resources. Thank
23 you for your time and your
24 dedication to our city's libraries.

1 COUNCILWOMAN LANDAU:

2 Thank you all so much. I just want
3 to say what you do for Philadelphia
4 is just incredible. Thank you.
5 Sorry that we can't have consistent
6 homes for you yet in the library
7 over the summer and the winter, but
8 we are absolutely going to make
9 that happen.

10 MS. LLOYD-SGAMBATI: I
11 just want to acknowledge a couple
12 of people. I don't know if
13 Veronica Britto is still here and
14 some of the other people who were
15 here from the library as well as
16 the librarians. Because for some
17 children, a lot of them don't have
18 libraries in their schools.

19 And the only way you're
20 going to teach a child to read and
21 love to read is if they have access
22 to books. And the only place
23 they're going to find that on a
24 consistent basis is the public

1 library. So whatever you can do,
2 my mission is about getting books
3 into the home too.

4 I heard a lot of things
5 this morning and I want people to
6 begin to understand that libraries
7 are not libraries. Libraries
8 perform a greater, bigger function
9 to give children the opportunity to
10 dream and to dream big.

11 (Applause.)

12 COUNCILWOMAN LANDAU:

13 Absolutely. Thank you so much.

14 The Chair recognizes
15 Councilmember Jay Young.

16 COUNCILMAN YOUNG: Thank
17 you, Madam Chair.

18 I just have a couple
19 questions on how we can help
20 essentially. So specifically with
21 Beyond Literacy, we know that a lot
22 of this results from generations of
23 systemic underinvestment on why our
24 adult learners are where they are.

1 So what can we do as a city to
2 demonstrate that we're accepting
3 responsibility for this, the
4 systemic historic disinvestment,
5 and we're not treating like adult
6 literacy like a charity, right, but
7 we're actually treating it like
8 it's an issue to really solve?
9 What can we really do?

10 MS. LLOYD-SGAMBATI: I
11 think the first thing you need to
12 begin to understand, we talk about
13 constantly over and over again
14 about the negative aspect of what's
15 happening in the literacy community
16 in the city, and nobody's talking
17 about the positive things. The
18 largest Black children's book fair
19 in the world is held here in
20 Philadelphia. 4000 people come to
21 buy books, so people need to draw a
22 parallel to that.

23 You got to give people
24 access and choice. And the only

1 way they're going to find it is in
2 a public library, more programming.
3 For example, Tommy, the latest
4 comedian, has a book out. Take him
5 to the local libraries. People
6 come in, they see him and they
7 begin to understand the importance
8 of reading. You got to find people
9 where they are. You got to meet
10 them in their space.

11 MS. HANNAH: Yeah. I
12 think we are investing a lot of
13 time in landscape assessments and
14 evaluations, as if we don't already
15 have information that we need to
16 make sound investment in programs
17 that work, consistent, sustained
18 investment over time, not one-off
19 grants. I mentioned that
20 programming is necessary in
21 libraries. We have two centers at
22 Beyond Literacy, five classrooms
23 total, to serve those 2000
24 learners.

1 If we had library spaces
2 that we could host classes and that
3 we could guarantee were open for
4 us, that we have the funding to
5 fund the staff, the teachers and
6 the student support personnel, we
7 don't have space, we don't have
8 dollars for infrastructure space.
9 So classrooms that could be
10 available to us with Wi-Fi access,
11 with laptops that we could give to
12 our learners or computers, desktop
13 computers that they could use for
14 classes, that would help a lot for
15 us to meet the 400-person waiting
16 list we consistently have. But we
17 can't.

18 As Chief Program and
19 Impact Officer, I have to look at
20 the impact of the partners that we
21 have. I can't place classes in
22 libraries if I know that the
23 students are going to get up in the
24 morning and go there and find them

1 shut. I can't. I have to just use
2 online classes, remote classes for
3 learners that can have the skills
4 to participate in that way and
5 schedule in our five little
6 classrooms those classes for
7 learners who could not function
8 online. I'd have much better
9 results, I think, if we had the
10 ability to have those in-person
11 classes.

12 The other thing I think
13 we need libraries to do and the
14 reason I think libraries are so
15 important, is because the adults we
16 serve, many of them, especially
17 those US-born ones who were
18 educated in those underfunding
19 schools, part of that underfunding
20 is they weren't served well in
21 those schools. There was trauma in
22 their childhood experience in
23 schools.

24 And so, putting

1 programming in schools is something
2 that we try to do. Our adults
3 resist sometimes. They're going
4 into schools with stigma and
5 embarrassment. There's something
6 different about going into a
7 library, right. You can go in
8 there and be learning to read and
9 no one knows you're learning to
10 read. They think you're going in
11 there to read. You go into an
12 elementary school for an adult ed
13 class, folks are going to know that
14 you're going in there because you
15 don't know how to read. So I'd
16 love for our libraries to be funded
17 in a way that we could use them as
18 adult education providers more
19 consistently.

20 COUNCILMAN YOUNG: Thank
21 you.

22 Thank you, Madam Chair.

23 COUNCILWOMAN LANDAU: We
24 have some people here for public

1 comment. We are running out of
2 time so thank you all so much. It
3 was really amazing. Appreciate
4 you.

5 Ms. Easley, can you call
6 the first few people for public
7 comment. I would like to say, if
8 you have your comments in writing,
9 you can submit them in writing to
10 the Clerk's office or to us, and
11 we'll give it to the Clerk's office
12 to get it on the record. But
13 unfortunately, we do have to leave
14 at 1 o'clock today.

15 Ms. Easley, will you
16 call the first few people for
17 public comment.

18 THE CLERK: We have
19 Peter Ahn, Paul Brown, Pat Thomas,
20 Cierra Freeman, Spanish Alexander.

21 (Witnesses approached
22 witness table.)

23 COUNCILWOMAN LANDAU:
24 Thank you. If you could just keep

1 your comments brief. I apologize.

2 We do want to hear from you, but

3 it's a timing issue.

4 Please state your name

5 for the record and proceed with

6 your testimony.

7 MR. AHN: Thank you.

8 Good afternoon. My name is Peter

9 Ahn. As a local clergy member,

10 where my congregation sits on

11 Council District No. 5, also I've

12 been in partnership with Cecil B.

13 Moore Coalition, I want to address

14 the issue of the stalling with the

15 Cecil B. Moore. In any

16 organizational challenges, there

17 are technical solutions and there

18 are adaptive solutions.

19 Much of the conversation

20 this morning, I feel were spent on

21 seeking technical solutions to

22 adaptive problems. Let me put it

23 this way, as Peter Drucker famously

24 put it, Culture eats strategy for

1 breakfast any day. We can have
2 good strategy. But if the
3 political culture is not there, it
4 doesn't move forward.

5 Where there's no
6 political will for action, there
7 are usually hidden political
8 cultural reasons that cause
9 stalling. So we need to think
10 about those things. When
11 councilmanic prerogative is
12 exercise in such a way that is not
13 aligned with Cecil B. Moore Library
14 community, and even the rationale
15 here Councilman Young has so far
16 provided does not make sense with
17 the rest of us, then we are left
18 with speculation of possibilities.

19 Possibility number one,
20 the Councilmember genuinely
21 believes that the library is beyond
22 repair, in which case he has not
23 demonstrated that he has initiated
24 earnest research to test that

1 hypothesis. Not having done any
2 structural visibility assessment
3 for 577 days does not make sense to
4 me. There is no clearer action
5 that took to motion.

6 Possibility number two,
7 the Councilmember simply doesn't
8 like Cecil B. Moore Library design
9 as it is and simply wants a
10 demolition and a complete new
11 build, in which case he has not
12 disclosed any information about
13 so-called private sector partners
14 he has in mind or might have been
15 in conversation with. Either way
16 for the possibility number one and
17 number two, this exercise of
18 councilmanic prerogative for the
19 two possibilities that are laid
20 out, they feel paternalistic.

21 Possibility number
22 three, the Councilmember is
23 actually listening to the people,
24 but different people other than the

1 Cecil B. Moore Library Coalition.
2 About a year and a half ago, I
3 spoke with the Councilmember. I
4 expressed my concerns about John
5 Fry being named as the new
6 President at Temple University,
7 with an impressive urban planning
8 track record, along with
9 gentrification.

10 At the time, I asked the
11 Councilmember, what do you
12 understand your role to be in this
13 situation? And he said, people
14 will need to organize. I
15 understand that Temple lost \$200
16 million a year, with enrollment
17 sliding at 27% and the retention
18 rate is worsening.

19 So what do you do? You
20 bring John Fry, yes, the former
21 admin of UPenn and the former
22 President of Drexel University.
23 Yes, Penntrification and Schuylkill
24 Yard development. Perhaps we

1 should confer with the
2 Councilmember Gauthier to weigh in
3 on saving University while not
4 destroying local Black/Brown
5 communities. Perhaps Temple has
6 their skin in the game, but are
7 they here.

8 COUNCILWOMAN LANDAU: I
9 need you to summarize now. I'm
10 sorry. We've got to get to other
11 folks, so please be --

12 MR. AHN: Thank you.
13 Fundamentally, especially when it
14 comes to public-private partnership
15 and making decisions about public
16 spaces, we cannot run schools like
17 a business. We cannot run
18 libraries like a business. We
19 cannot develop or implement urban
20 planning while displacing libraries
21 or communities.

22 COUNCILWOMAN LANDAU:
23 Thank you so much. Let's move on
24 to the next one. Thank you.

1 Please state your name
2 for the record.

3 MR. BROWN: Hi. My name
4 is Paul Brown. I'm a youth and
5 education co-lead for Brewerytown
6 Sharswood Neighborhood Coalition.
7 I'm also a school psychologist for
8 the school district. I want to
9 thank you both because he showed up
10 for the school board meeting
11 yesterday. It was powerful to see
12 our representatives advocating
13 against school closures and
14 investment in education.

15 But I have to note
16 there's irony for Councilmember
17 Jeffrey Young advocating for
18 schools to remain as learning
19 spaces, but this is not being
20 generalized to other aspects within
21 the district. Councilmember Young
22 noted Robert Morris is closing, an
23 educational hub will no longer
24 exist for this neighborhood. If

1 Cecil B. Moore Library is not
2 allowed to exist in its current
3 capacity, that exacerbates the lack
4 of educational opportunities for
5 those families.

6 We're hearing an echo of
7 some of these libraries are too far
8 gone for investment and we should
9 invest elsewhere. That's the same
10 thing the school board voted on
11 yesterday. I saw students from
12 Lankenau High School crying. Is
13 this the same fate for people in
14 our neighborhood. The desired
15 outcome skips over those that are
16 impacted.

17 I'm asking for full
18 funding for the Cecil B. Moore
19 Library. There's been an assertion
20 that there's a plan, but we have no
21 plan. I'm asking for a feasibility
22 study. We just don't have anything
23 concrete. We're being told there
24 is something we could do, but we

1 have nothing in writing that shows
2 the full capacity we could have for
3 the Cecil B. Moore Library.

4 Councilmember Jeffrey
5 Young has proposed to 2 million for
6 ADA and HVAC upgrades for the
7 library. That doesn't address the
8 overall needs of the library. That
9 is based on your vision, and
10 there's a remaining 8 million left
11 unaccounted for. I appreciate the
12 desire to bring learning spaces
13 up-to-date. You don't have to
14 erase the past, including cultural
15 anchors to do that.

16 There is an option where
17 we can expand rather than
18 consolidate resources, which
19 we've --

20 COUNCILWOMAN LANDAU:
21 Thank you so much.

22 MR. BROWN: I'm almost
23 done, which we've learned from.
24 The school district

1 disproportionately and
2 systematically impacts Black and
3 Brown working-class folks. To act
4 in good faith to create libraries,
5 we want -- please announce the full
6 release of funds for Cecil B. Moore
7 Library for renovations created by
8 the community.

9 COUNCILWOMAN LANDAU:

10 Thank you so much.

11 Please state your name
12 for the record and proceed with
13 your testimony, whoever's next.

14 MS. THOMAS: Good
15 afternoon. My name is Patricia
16 Thomas. Good afternoon,
17 Councilman. I have a comment as
18 well as a couple of questions. I'm
19 going to be very brief and respect
20 the time. The question is, why are
21 you not releasing the fund for the
22 Cecil B. Moore Library? Number
23 two, previous Councilmen had
24 approved funding for the library to

1 be renovated. Why are you holding
2 those funds up? Additional funds
3 was given after the Mayor came into
4 office as well.

5 Are you looking for a
6 particular developer, someone that
7 you know to do the job, what is the
8 hold up and why not release those
9 funds? I know that you have been
10 in communication with the library
11 and you guys may have had
12 differences, but are you taking it
13 personal? I'm talking to
14 Councilman Jeffrey Young.

15 COUNCILMAN YOUNG: So
16 there's no developer in mind. This
17 is a public project, so the city
18 will go through the regular
19 procurement process as they would
20 do. This is not -- it's personal
21 to me because it's a community that
22 we represent, right. So we want to
23 ensure that the community gets the
24 best, the very best things that it

1 can have.

2 When we are working
3 through this process, we have
4 established a working group. So
5 please join a working group, right,
6 to get that information, to stay
7 updated on what's going on and how
8 we move forward with our libraries
9 and our communities.

10 MS. THOMAS: It's not
11 about just what you want, but it's
12 about what the community wants.
13 And the community wants the library
14 to be renovated. The question to
15 you is, these fundings was already
16 approved before you was elected
17 into your position. What is the
18 hold up? Why are you holding that
19 up? Why?

20 COUNCILMAN YOUNG: I
21 just mentioned that we are creating
22 a working group. Join the working
23 group and we can continue to have
24 the conversation about the Cecil B.

1 Moore Library.

2 COUNCILWOMAN LANDAU:

3 I'm going to move on. I want to
4 get as many voices on for public
5 comment as possible. So please,
6 the next person, if you can be
7 brief --

8 MS. THOMAS: One
9 question, if I may. Are you
10 looking for a particular developer
11 from New Jersey or Philadelphia?

12 COUNCILWOMAN LANDAU:
13 I'm so sorry. He already responded
14 to that and says it goes through
15 the city's RFP process --

16 MS. THOMAS: Okay. I
17 yield the floor back.

18 COUNCILWOMAN LANDAU:
19 Could you please state your name
20 for the record, whoever's next, and
21 please proceed with your testimony.

22 MS. NEITZEL: Good
23 morning. My name is Siobhan
24 Neitzel. I'm here today because

1 I'm a constituent of Councilmember
2 Young's and I'm a supporter of
3 libraries throughout Philadelphia.
4 I'm a library patron and a member
5 of the Brewerytown Sharswood
6 Neighborhood Coalition. I'm
7 speaking here regarding Resolution
8 251083 and I fully urge you to fund
9 all libraries.

10 I'm specifically here to
11 speak on the Cecil B. Moore
12 Library. The Cecil B. Moore
13 Library has stood for decades as an
14 anchor of learning, safety and
15 connection, and serves six
16 neighborhoods in North
17 Philadelphia. While the
18 renovations that Councilmember
19 Young has planned are needed for
20 the library to be safe and
21 ADA-accessible, they do not go far
22 enough and do not reflect the wants
23 of the community.

24 On January 14, 2026 when

1 speaking with City Cast Philly,
2 Councilmember Young stated, I think
3 that the community wasn't given the
4 option to imagine what could be
5 there, to imagine what a future
6 could be for our community. Well,
7 community members have dreamed and
8 stated what the library renovation
9 should be. However, when the
10 renovations that Councilmember
11 Young has planned, community
12 members will not get what they have
13 imagined and dreamed about.

14 Additionally, with this
15 plan the community stands to have
16 an improved ADA-accessible library
17 with new HVAC by next summer, but
18 be left without an expanded space
19 for programming for an unknown
20 amount of time as the Councilmember
21 moves the library and moves it
22 closer to Temple University and
23 right outside the Temple patrol
24 zone, which ends at 18th and Cecil

1 B. Moore. And the library is
2 proposed to be at 19th and Cecil B.
3 Moore.

4 Councilmember Young also
5 stated on January 14, 2026 when
6 speaking about the plans for the
7 library, it could still benefit
8 North Philadelphia, still benefit
9 our communities. However, that's
10 not true if the library is moved.
11 Councilmember Young stated on
12 January 22, 2026 in this very room
13 that our children deserve
14 stability. If this plan goes
15 through and the Cecil B. Moore
16 Library is moved, then our children
17 will have to travel an average of
18 29% further to get to this library.

19 The Cecil B. Moore -- at
20 least one elementary will no longer
21 have the Cecil B. Moore Library as
22 their closest library. And this
23 doesn't just impact children. This
24 impacts our whole community, as

1 there'll be fewer bus routes near
2 the proposed new location, and that
3 means fewer bus stops. Our
4 community disturbs stability and
5 this isn't stability to me.

6 The plan to move the
7 library is based on a professional
8 opinion, and the community has not
9 been able to weigh in on all the
10 options and it will negatively
11 impact the community while serving
12 Temple University. In order to
13 show what can be included in a
14 renovation, a feasibility study of
15 the Cecil B. Moore Library should
16 be completed around the possibility
17 of building above and in front of
18 the library. The results of this
19 study must be shared with the
20 community so that all options can
21 be weighed when providing feedback.

22 Councilmember Young, you
23 also stated on December 4, 2025
24 right in this room, that leadership

1 requires engagement, not avoidance,
2 and that's something that I always
3 do in our district. And more
4 recently on January 22, 2026 you
5 also stated, I'm not opposed to
6 change, I'm opposed to change
7 without transparency, change
8 without a community voice.

9 Therefore, I urge you,
10 Councilmember Young, to change your
11 mind, listen to what community
12 members have stated, release the
13 funds that have been raised,
14 renovate the library and commit to
15 keeping the library at its current
16 location of 2320 Cecil B. Moore Ave
17 and do the feasibility study now.

18 COUNCILWOMAN LANDAU:
19 Thank you so much. There are three
20 people left for public comment.
21 And I believe we can actually, if
22 we're very brief, get everybody on
23 the record. Thank you.

24 MS. FREEMAN: Hi. My

1 name is Cierra Freeman. I'm a
2 member of the Brewerytown Sharswood
3 neighborhood. I am a mother of a
4 student that currently attends
5 Philadelphia public school, and I
6 am the Co-lead of Culture and
7 Strategy for Brewerytown Sharswood
8 Neighborhood Coalition.

9 Before I say anything
10 else today, I want to say, Happy
11 May Day and I'm so glad to be here
12 with D.C. 47 and in full support of
13 D.C. 47 and D.C. 33 workers that
14 have had to work in these atrocious
15 environments for far too long, and
16 I'm so excited about the funding
17 that they have in them securing
18 additional funding so that they can
19 get the HVAC repaired across the
20 City of Philadelphia and in the 5th
21 District.

22 I also want to say thank
23 you, Councilman, for the work that
24 you've done thus far to advance the

1 HVAC repair, the electricity and
2 getting an ADA-accessibility
3 elevator in the bathrooms upcoming
4 for the Cecil B. Moore Library.
5 That is very important and those
6 things are very needed. I'm here
7 today to share and I have written
8 testimony, but I am not reading my
9 testimony right now.

10 One of the quotes that
11 I've read that has been so profound
12 to me that I make it a part of my
13 everyday life is from an
14 organization called the WildSeed
15 Society. It's a social justice
16 organization in the United States
17 of Philadelphia. One of those
18 quotes is, Accountability is the
19 gift that we give to each other
20 that allows us to stay in line with
21 our intentions and with our values.

22 I am here today,
23 Councilman, to offer you that gift,
24 along with the other community

1 members, along with members of BSNC
2 to offer and ask for the full
3 release of the \$9.9 million that is
4 available to renovate the Cecil B.
5 Moore Library. We know that there
6 are so many things that are going
7 on with the libraries across the
8 city. We heard a lot of testimony
9 today. Definitely hold space for
10 those things and advocate alongside
11 those folks to get what they need.

12 And right here in our
13 backyard, we have worked since 2022
14 with community members, had a town
15 hall of over nearly not over 400
16 people that are community members,
17 block captains, committee people,
18 leaders of resident-led
19 organizations, parents, patrons of
20 the library saying that they want
21 this library renovated.

22 We acknowledge and also
23 continue to thank you that when you
24 came into office, you went to the

1 Mayor, you requested additional
2 monies and you were granted an
3 additional \$5 million that brings
4 us up to the total of \$9.9 million
5 and we cannot lose the stick-to-
6 itiveness of the community and
7 their work to raise the funding as
8 well.

9 In a neighborhood like
10 North Philadelphia, where so often
11 our voices, our thoughts, our ideas
12 are pushed to the side, BSNC is
13 doing trauma-informed community
14 building to reinvigorate neighbors,
15 for neighbors to believe in their
16 own ability, to talk to their
17 elected officials, to talk to
18 leaders of their community, to get
19 the things that they want. Again,
20 giving you the gift to stay
21 accountable to that \$9.9 million to
22 give neighbors what they ask for,
23 what they fought for, what they
24 know that they can have because the

1 funding is there.

2 Extend the renovation to
3 include the youth spaces, the adult
4 spaces, update the kitchen. And
5 lastly but not least, Councilman, I
6 have to ask you: If we have the
7 option to figure out how we can get
8 a feasibility study done so that we
9 can build above and out for this
10 library to have the 21st century
11 library that you've said and that
12 we also believe as a community that
13 we deserve, would you be open to
14 considering that option for us?

15 COUNCILMAN YOUNG: So
16 I'll say the Parks -- not Parks &
17 Rec, the Library system, you were
18 on that call, the experts in the
19 system said that the way the
20 building is currently designed with
21 the infrastructure that's in place,
22 we cannot build above that library.
23 That's the libraries -- I mean,
24 that's the Capital Projects

1 assessment of it.

2 We need more space. All
3 the space you're talking about for
4 youth space and adult programming,
5 it isn't there. It isn't there.
6 The current teen space is 400
7 square feet. How many teens can
8 fit in that space to really, really
9 utilize what the library can really
10 be? We've heard testimony about
11 what the library could really be.
12 That current footprint doesn't
13 allow any of that space. We can't
14 even have a community meeting there
15 without disrupting the library,
16 patrons, right. That's what a
17 library space should be for.

18 And so, when we're
19 asking to imagine, think boldly,
20 right, what our future really need,
21 what our kids really need, what our
22 communities really need, more space
23 is needed in order to accommodate
24 programs like Beyond Literacy, so

1 they can come in and teach their
2 program without disrupting regular
3 library patrons, everyday library
4 patrons. That can't happen at the
5 Cecil B. Moore Library right now.

6 So that's what we're
7 asking for. That's what we're
8 fighting for. We're fighting for
9 more for our community.

10 MS. FREEMAN: If I can,
11 Councilman, I was on the call. And
12 what was said is that no
13 feasibility study was done. That's
14 what was said. And so, the
15 question still remains can we have
16 a feasibility study so that we can
17 see if the library can be built up
18 or out to get that additional
19 space?

20 COUNCILMAN YOUNG: I'm
21 not opposed to a feasibility
22 study --

23 MS. FREEMAN: Perfect.

24 COUNCILMAN YOUNG: --

1 not at all.

2 COUNCILWOMAN LANDAU:

3 Thank you so much. We've got to
4 get the staff out of here. I'm
5 sorry.

6 Please state your name
7 for the record.

8 MR. ALEXANDER: My name
9 is Spanish Alexander. I'll be
10 really quick. Thank you so much
11 for letting me speak. Good
12 afternoon, everyone. My name is
13 Spanish Alexander. I'm just a
14 public citizen here to state how
15 important the library is to me. I
16 used to live on 24th and Cecil B.
17 Moore.

18 And when I lived there,
19 I used to go to the library and get
20 a bunch of different books on
21 Malcolm X and Martin Luther King
22 and information about the Black
23 women fighting for equal rights,
24 and I used to go in my room and

1 read it all the time so that
2 library is important to me. I also
3 decided to run for office in that
4 ward. And so, I actually saw my
5 name on a ballot posted outside
6 that library. That was my posting
7 place, you know. So that was my
8 first taste of democracy there.
9 And I fell in love with taking care
10 of people and loving people.

11 And so, this comes right
12 back to something that I think that
13 I need to fight for, because I used
14 to walk to that library every day.
15 This library is important because
16 we need to conserve the traditions
17 and the culture, not only in
18 Philadelphia, but of the Black
19 people in Philadelphia, and this
20 library holds a lot of history of
21 African Americans.

22 And so, I think the way
23 I learned from this library that
24 other young people in the community

1 now, especially youth with
2 everything going on. It's
3 important for them to be able to go
4 there and receive that same type of
5 information or receive that same
6 type of experience. And it's very
7 nice to meet you, Councilman and
8 all of you. Thank you so much for
9 letting me speak.

10 I just want to say thank
11 you so much for what you've done.
12 I'm not sure about how the funds
13 are allocated, but I'm definitely
14 very happy to know that the library
15 is still going to be there.

16 COUNCILWOMAN LANDAU:
17 Thank you so much. Appreciate you.

18 COUNCILMAN YOUNG: Thank
19 you. I studied for the bar exam in
20 that library, so it's a place
21 that's important to me as well.

22 MR. ALEXANDER:
23 Absolutely.

24 COUNCILWOMAN LANDAU:

1 Thank you. Please state your name
2 for the record.

3 MS. CUMMINGS: Good
4 afternoon, everyone. My name is
5 Bonita Cummings and I am the
6 Director of Strawberry Mansion
7 Community Concern. And
8 environmentally, we've cleaned
9 along that corridor of Cecil B.
10 Moore Avenue for the library for
11 the children. I just wanted to say
12 that there's a separation between
13 the resolution overall library
14 needs and conditions and the
15 advocacy around the Cecil B. Moore
16 Library.

17 The advocacy and
18 activism made me revisit what those
19 words' intended definition is. So
20 I looked at three prominent
21 leaders, Dr. Martin Luther King,
22 Fannie Lou Hamer and the Honorable
23 Dr. Leon Sullivan. Their advocacy
24 expanded -- their advocacy was what

1 we would define as against
2 injustice. They expanded equality
3 for all.

4 This advocacy from the
5 groups, and people keep referring
6 to the community in these meetings
7 where really it wasn't community,
8 this advocacy is an injustice
9 masked as justice. And I think
10 that's very important for the
11 citizens of the City of
12 Philadelphia to be clear about.

13 We have a librarian in
14 the Cecil B. Moore Library who has
15 said to the children, the African
16 American children of that community
17 that they don't deserve to expand,
18 they don't deserve to have the
19 opportunity to have a library that
20 brings them into the 21st century.
21 We've had information here today
22 defining the illiteracy of the
23 children of that community.

24 We've had groups here

1 today that talk about their need to
2 be in the libraries, so what their
3 need is can't be met at the Cecil
4 B. Moore Library because it's
5 already been deemed not really
6 suitable for the expansion that
7 we're looking for. So I just
8 wanted to talk about that because I
9 think the activism has been a grave
10 injustice activism to the citizens
11 of this city.

12 It's been violent and it
13 has made our children and given our
14 children the ability to witness and
15 demonstrate how to be disregarding
16 and disrespectful even to our
17 leadership. So I just wanted to
18 express that. Thank you.

19 COUNCILWOMAN LANDAU: I
20 think everybody here today wants to
21 do the best that we all possibly
22 can for the Cecil B. Moore Library.
23 So might have different paths to
24 get there, but I believe everybody

Joint Committees on Legislative Oversight

1 wants the same thing.

2 Any closing remarks?

3 COUNCILMAN YOUNG: Yes.

4 I just want to thank everyone for
5 coming down today, for listening,
6 for testifying. This information
7 will be taken back and we're going
8 to do something about our library
9 system. We spend the least amount
10 of money of any big city and that
11 is a crime.

12 And so, Councilmember
13 Rue Landau and I, we're in our
14 first terms. Things take time, but
15 I can promise you we're going to
16 keep fighting for our library
17 system.

18 COUNCILWOMAN LANDAU:
19 Fully agree. Can't wait to help
20 you. Can't wait to start this
21 working group. Thank you all so
22 much for your testimony.

23 This concludes the
24 business before the Committees on

Joint Committees on Legislative Oversight

1 Legislative Oversight and Parks,
2 Recreation and Cultural Affairs.
3 Thank you very much for your
4 attendance and we will be in touch
5 soon.

6 (Joint Committees on
7 Legislative Oversight & Parks and
8 Recreation concluded at 1:48 p.m.)

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Joint Committees on Legislative Oversight

1 C E R T I F I C A T I O N

2 I, hereby certify that the proceedings
3 and evidence noted are contained fully and
4 accurately in the stenographic notes taken
5 by me in the foregoing matter, and that
6 this is a correct transcript of the same.
7

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TANEHA CARROLL
Court Reporter - Notary Public

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City of Philadelphia

Public Hearing Notice

The **Joint Committees on Legislative Oversight & Parks and Recreation** of the Council of the City of Philadelphia will hold a Public Hearing on **Friday, May 1, 2026**, at **10:00 AM**, in **Room 400, City Hall**, to hear testimony on the following items:

- 251083** Resolution authorizing the Council Committees on Legislative Oversight and Parks, Recreation, and Cultural Affairs to hold hearings to investigate the current conditions and future of Philadelphia's public libraries.

Immediately following the public hearing, a meeting of the Joint Committees on Legislative Oversight & Parks and Recreation, open to the public, will be held to consider the action to be taken on the above listed items.

Copies of the foregoing items are available in the Office of the Chief Clerk of the Council, Room 402, City Hall.