

COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA
COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Room 400, City Hall
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Tuesday, April 22, 2014
10:20 a.m.

PRESENT:

COUNCIL PRESIDENT DARRELL L. CLARKE
COUNCILWOMAN CINDY BASS
COUNCILWOMAN JANNIE BLACKWELL
COUNCILMAN W. WILSON GOODE, JR.
COUNCILMAN WILLIAM K. GREENLEE
COUNCILMAN BOBBY HENON
COUNCILMAN KENYATTA JOHNSON
COUNCILMAN CURTIS JONES, JR.
COUNCILMAN JAMES KENNEY
COUNCILMAN DENNIS O'BRIEN
COUNCILMAN DAVID OH
COUNCILMAN BRIAN J. O'NEILL
COUNCILWOMAN MARIA D. QUINONES-SANCHEZ
COUNCILWOMAN BLONDELL REYNOLDS BROWN
COUNCILMAN MARK SQUILLA
COUNCILWOMAN MARIAN B. TASCO

BILLS 130489, 140140, 140144, 140145, 140146,
140147, and 140148
RESOLUTION 140159

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COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Good morning, everyone. This is the public hearing of the Committee of the Whole regarding Bill Nos. 130489, 140140, 140144, 140145, 140146, 140147, and 140148 and Resolution 140159.

I would ask Ms. Lewis to please read the titles of the bills and resolution.

MS. LEWIS: Bill No. 130489, an ordinance amending Chapter 19-2500 of The Philadelphia Code, entitled "Real Estate Non-Utilization Tax," by changing certain tax rates; all under certain terms and conditions.

Bill No. 140140, an ordinance amending Chapter 19-1500 of The Philadelphia Code, entitled "Wage and Net Profits Tax," by decreasing the rate or rates of tax imposed upon certain low income persons, providing for refunds of excess taxes paid, directing the Revenue Department to develop procedures and forms whereby eligible taxpayers can

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 obtain such refunds, and requiring
3 employers to provide refund forms to
4 employees; all under certain terms and
5 conditions.

6 Bill No. 140144, an ordinance
7 to adopt a Capital Program for the six
8 Fiscal Years 2015 through 2020 inclusive.

9 Bill No. 140145, an ordinance
10 to adopt a Fiscal 2015 Capital Budget.

11 Bill No. 140146, an ordinance
12 adopting the Operating Budget for Fiscal
13 Year 2015.

14 Bill No. 140147, an ordinance
15 amending Section 19-1806 of The
16 Philadelphia Code, entitled
17 "Authorization of Realty Use and
18 Occupancy Tax," to further authorize the
19 Board of Education of the School District
20 of Philadelphia to impose a tax on the
21 use or occupancy of real estate within
22 the School District of Philadelphia,
23 under certain terms and conditions.

24 Bill No. 140148, an ordinance
25 amending Section 19-1801 of The

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 Philadelphia Code, entitled
3 "Authorization of Tax," to further
4 authorize the Board of Education of the
5 School District of Philadelphia to impose
6 a tax on real estate within the City of
7 Philadelphia, under certain terms and
8 conditions.

9 Resolution No. 140159,
10 providing for the approval by the Council
11 of the City of Philadelphia of a Revised
12 Five Year Financial Plan for the City of
13 Philadelphia covering Fiscal Years 2015
14 through 2019, and incorporating proposed
15 changes with respect to Fiscal Year 2014,
16 which is to be submitted by the Mayor to
17 the Pennsylvania Intergovernmental
18 Cooperation Authority (the "Authority")
19 pursuant to the Intergovernmental
20 Cooperation Agreement, authorized by an
21 Ordinance of this Council approved by the
22 Mayor on January 3rd, 1992 (Bill No.
23 1563-A), by and between the City and the
24 Authority.

25 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: You did

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 that all in one breath? Thank you,
3 Ms. Lewis.

4 Today we continue the public
5 hearing of the Committee of the Whole to
6 consider various bills read by Ms. Lewis
7 that constitute proposed operating and
8 capital spending measures for Fiscal Year
9 2015, a Capital Program, and a
10 forward-looking Capital Plan for Fiscal
11 Year 2015 through Fiscal Year 2020.

12 This morning before we hear
13 testimony from the City departments, I
14 would like to note for the record two
15 items. First, please note that Bill No.
16 140140, the low-income tax credit, and
17 130489, real estate non-utilization tax,
18 will not be considered today at the
19 request of the sponsor and will be rolled
20 over and recessed along with all other
21 bills being considered in this budget
22 hearing.

23 At this time, I want to go into
24 a public meeting very briefly so that we
25 can offer three amendments to the Capital

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 Program and Capital Budget. The three
3 amendments are to provide capital funding
4 to the Betsy Ross House, the Philadelphia
5 History Museum, formerly known as the
6 Atwater Kent, and the Free Library of
7 Philadelphia. I'd like to explain the
8 reason for offering these amendments at
9 this time.

10 As submitted to Council, the
11 proposed Capital Program and Capital
12 Budget for Fiscal Year '15 authorizes no
13 funding for the Betsy Ross House,
14 Philadelphia History Museum, and Free
15 Library of Philadelphia. The amendments
16 in question will add 2.9 million in new
17 dollars to the FY15 Capital Program and
18 Capital Budget and allocated in the
19 following manner:

20 \$250,000 to the Betsy Ross
21 House, a City-owned historic landmark by,
22 among other things, replacing the chiller
23 and air conditioning unit, upgrading the
24 fire security system, installing new
25 emergency lighting, renovating public

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 restrooms, and making improvements to the
3 handicap accessibility areas at the main
4 building and its annex;
5 \$250,000 to the Philadelphia
6 History Museum, a City-owned historic
7 landmark by, among other things,
8 preserving the historic building
9 exterior, which dates back to 1826,
10 increasing exterior security, and
11 repurposing the Museum's garden to a
12 multi-purpose education and performance
13 space; and
14 \$2.4 million to the Free
15 Library of Philadelphia to make a
16 Redevelopment Assistance Capital Program
17 grant that will launch the 21st Century
18 Libraries initiative that will result in
19 the renovation of every neighborhood
20 library. The funding will allow for
21 construction that will begin
22 simultaneously on four branches,
23 providing for handicap accessibility,
24 mixed private and communal spaces that
25 will allow patrons to take full advantage

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 of the library's healthcare, educational,
3 and job search resources, and an improved
4 children's space and newly designated
5 teen areas.

6 We are taking this action now
7 because of a requirement in the Home Rule
8 Charter concerning amendments to the
9 Capital Program. Before Council can
10 enact an amendment to the Capital Program
11 of this nature, we must first request
12 through the Mayor the recommendations of
13 the City Planning Commission. The
14 Commission has 30 days in which to
15 respond with its recommendations. So we
16 want to start the clock running now.

17 Do the Councilmembers present
18 have copies of the proposed amendments?
19 I believe they were just given to you.
20 Thank you.

21 Councilman Goode will offer
22 these amendments. We will not be
23 requesting a vote on the amendments. Our
24 intent is to get these amendments in the
25 record.

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.

2 We will now briefly recess, as
3 I said before, our public hearing and go
4 into a public meeting for the purpose of
5 introducing these amendments into the
6 official record.

7 The Chair recognizes Councilman
8 Goode.

9 COUNCILMAN GOODE: Thank you,
10 Mr. Chairman. I offer the proposed
11 amendments to Bills No. 140144 and 140145
12 and request that no vote be taken on them
13 at this time.

14 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Thank
15 you, Councilman.

16 We'll see that the stenographer
17 receives a copy of both amendments so
18 that they may be part of the record.

19 We will now go back into our
20 public hearing, and today we'll hear
21 testimony from City departments, the
22 Revenue Department, Board of Revision of
23 Taxes, and on the revenue tax bills, and
24 later today we will have public
25 testimony.

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.

2 Our first department is the
3 Department of Revenue. Commissioner and
4 whoever else.

5 (Witnesses approached witness
6 table.)

7 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Good
8 morning.

9 COMMISSIONER TOLSON: Good
10 morning, Councilman.

11 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Please
12 proceed with what I know will be your
13 summarized testimony and then we'll have
14 questions.

15 COMMISSIONER TOLSON: Good
16 morning to our Chair, Councilman
17 Greenlee, and members of City Council. I
18 am Clarena Tolson, Chief Collection
19 Officer and Revenue Commissioner. The
20 following testimony provides an overview
21 of the Department of Revenue's Fiscal '15
22 Operating Budget and our strategies and
23 goals.

24 The mission of the Revenue
25 Department is to optimize the collection

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 of revenue to provide funding for schools
3 and services, assuring that everyone pays
4 their fair share while assisting those in
5 need of financial assistance. Our goal
6 is to create a culture of compliance by
7 sending strong, clear messages that the
8 City cannot subsidize businesses and
9 individuals at the expense of children
10 and citizens.

11 The major strategies we have
12 employed to support our efforts in
13 meeting our mission include: improved
14 customer service, supporting those in
15 financial need, creating stronger
16 consequences for non-compliance, building
17 partnerships to enhance collection
18 activities, providing early action on
19 delinquency, providing greater education
20 to the public and business community,
21 integrating technology to improve
22 efficiencies and effectiveness.

23 Over the last year, we have
24 seen progress on many fronts. I offer a
25 few highlights, not to say where they are

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 where they should be, but that we're
3 making great strides in making that very
4 quickly.

5 To highlight several key
6 collection results as compared to last
7 fiscal year, total school income tax is
8 up 104 percent. Delinquent school income
9 tax collections have increased by 275
10 percent. Total liquor tax is up 23
11 percent. Delinquent liquor collection
12 has increased by 200 percent. Delinquent
13 use and occupancy collections have
14 increased by 29 percent. There's been a
15 38 percent increase in total delinquent
16 collections for the School District.
17 Delinquent real estate collections are up
18 22 percent. And last year for the
19 Calendar Year '13, we achieved a rate
20 that is our highest in a couple decades,
21 which is a 94 percent collection rate for
22 our real estate.

23 The Department continues to
24 meet organizational goals such as MBE
25 participation and promoting diversity in

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 our workplace, with an executive staff of
3 one half minority and close to the same
4 for women. We are proud of our workplace
5 inclusion. Our M/W/DBE participation is
6 also expected to exceed 50 percent.

7 Relative to some of our
8 initiatives, both past and current, a
9 centerpiece of our collection activity is
10 the revocation of the Commercial Activity
11 Licenses for those businesses that have
12 been delinquent in their business taxes.
13 Though we certainly never want to have to
14 close a business, it ultimately is the
15 only leverage that we may have to use for
16 some businesses who will not become
17 compliant in any other way. In less than
18 one year, we have collected over \$20
19 million in cash through this program. An
20 additional \$7.5 million is committed to
21 payment agreements also through this
22 program.

23 Included in those funds are \$6
24 and a half million for liquor, \$6.3
25 million for BIRT, and \$2.3 million for

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 the wage tax. You'll note that that 6.5
3 is dedicated to the School District
4 funding.

5 The other significant program
6 that we have for collections is the
7 innovation with regard to sequestration
8 or receivership. This is a program that
9 existed some 30 years ago, but has been
10 revived in a slightly different manner
11 where we have court-appointed receivers
12 to collect rental income and to operate
13 delinquent businesses or properties until
14 the taxes are paid. We presently have
15 244 active petitions filed with the
16 court, and since October when this
17 program first started -- so it is very
18 much in its infancy -- \$4.1 million has
19 been collected for the program.

20 Another tool that you're quite
21 familiar with on collections is Sheriff
22 Sales. That continues to be an effective
23 tool. Our average number of all
24 properties placed in the Sheriff Sale
25 process by our legal unit, our law unit,

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 and co-counsel has increased from 354 per
3 month in Fiscals '11 and '12 to 1,065 per
4 month for Fiscals '13 and '14.

5 The Department continues to
6 build strong partnerships, and over the
7 last several months, we've built a closer
8 relationship with the state, and we have
9 received information from them that will
10 enable us to identify taxpayers that
11 could owe significant school income tax
12 as well as other taxes as we continue to
13 do our audits and discovery. This will
14 only add to our success that we've seen
15 in some of our other initiatives and
16 increase our collection rates.

17 In terms of new initiatives,
18 our cashiering and remittance system and
19 our comprehensive data warehouse is still
20 underway. We're well into the
21 implementation of the cashiering system
22 and the final stages of selecting a
23 vendor -- or starting with a vendor to
24 develop the integrated data warehouse.
25 We have selected a vendor.

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2 We are developing a more
3 integrated outreach and communication
4 strategy additionally. That will
5 increase our presence in the community
6 meetings. In fact, we are regularly now
7 going out to meet with community groups,
8 certainly at the request sometimes of
9 elected officials, but also upon our own
10 pursuit of opportunities to discuss
11 assistance programs and also filing
12 requirements. We are happy to provide
13 clearer and more informative hand
14 products, brochures and pamphlets, as
15 well as continue to improve our website
16 and use of technology such as the virtual
17 town hall meetings, branding, and other
18 technological improvements.

19 There will be a new water bill
20 design that's going to be in effect in
21 another two months, which will make it
22 easier for customers to interpret
23 information that has been provided to
24 them.

25 The budget proposed here allows

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 the Department to engage its mission of
3 revenues for schools and services.
4 Therefore, we request your favorable
5 consideration of the budget and state
6 that I am available for any questions
7 that you may have at this time.

8 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Thank
9 you, Commissioner. Thank you for all the
10 work you do in your second stint as a
11 Commissioner after the Streets
12 Department, and I think it's fair to say
13 that we've seen a tremendous improvement
14 in the collection since you've been the
15 Commissioner, so you certainly deserve a
16 lot of credit for that, because as you
17 pointed out, all this money, besides
18 being due, goes to either one of the City
19 departments to make the City run better
20 or to the School District, and we
21 obviously all know how much the School
22 District needs additional funding.

23 But on that note, as you talk
24 about collection rates up in all those
25 various taxes, how much more than the

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 budgeted revenue is expected to be
3 received by the City and the School
4 District in FY14 due to this collection
5 increase? Do you have such a figure?

6 COMMISSIONER TOLSON: I don't
7 know that we can say that -- I can say at
8 this time how much more we expect to pass
9 what has been budgeted. Our budget goals
10 are very challenging. We have with our
11 real estate taxes, which is a significant
12 elephant in the room, we're still working
13 through the process with regard to final
14 billing for people as they go through
15 appeals. We are seeing very strong
16 performances on many of our taxes, but
17 I'm not prepared as yet to estimate where
18 we will wind up ultimately.

19 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Okay. So
20 it's still all being calculated, I guess.

21 COMMISSIONER TOLSON: All being
22 calculated and some very strong
23 performances, but also some challenges.

24 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Okay. I
25 got you. And speaking of the elephant in

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 the room, the real estate taxes, in
3 talking to the Council President, we've
4 heard a lot of examples in his district
5 and I'm sure in others where people have
6 paid the LOOP payment, they're eligible
7 for it, they paid it, but the record is
8 still showing delinquency costs even
9 though they paid the amount they're
10 supposed to pay. Is that just kind of a
11 computer glitch or are you still catching
12 up with that?

13 COMMISSIONER TOLSON: We are in
14 collaboration with OPA. We are
15 finalizing the certifications for all of
16 our properties that have applied for
17 LOOP, and we expect that over the next
18 three to four weeks, that that will be
19 finalized so people's records will
20 accurately reflect their involvement in
21 the process.

22 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Okay. So
23 you're saying as soon as it's verified
24 that they were eligible, then that cost
25 will be -- the interest will be taken

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 off?

3 COMMISSIONER TOLSON:

4 Absolutely. Their participation is
5 clear. However, the records, our
6 computer records and files that may be
7 viewed on the web, are not up to date as
8 yet. So we are still in the process of
9 doing the formal, I'll say, programming
10 to provide those accurate certifications,
11 and once that is done, everyone's record
12 will be clear.

13 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Okay.

14 COMMISSIONER TOLSON: And any
15 interest and penalties that will be added
16 will be automatically deducted.

17 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: That's
18 important, because obviously our real
19 estate tax, particularly the people who
20 were eligible for LOOP, it's a
21 significant savings for them, and then
22 when they see they're being charged
23 interest, they get a little upset.

24 COMMISSIONER TOLSON: Yes.

25 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: They call

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.

2 folks like us. No. I appreciate that.

3 And, again, timeframe, what was that?

4 COMMISSIONER TOLSON: It should
5 be within three to four weeks.

6 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Three to
7 four weeks. Great. Thank you.

8 COMMISSIONER TOLSON: I should
9 say, Councilman, I think that -- this is
10 in tandem with the earlier comment about
11 how we are performing -- that we have a
12 team of folks who are taking to heart the
13 need to have a legitimate and credible
14 and fair system, and they appreciate and
15 understand their role in government to
16 support our citizens in a fair process.
17 Fair doesn't always feel good, but we try
18 to make it fair. And certainly with the
19 spirit of cooperation with Council, but
20 also in the spirit of cooperation with
21 our citizens, we will try to alleviate as
22 many problems that we may cause, such as
23 not being able to maybe in a more timely
24 manner adjust our computer records, but
25 we are catching up with that process.

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2 It's the first time doing this
3 with LOOP, and the staff that is working
4 on it has been working on all cylinders,
5 in addition to working on other programs
6 as well. But it's important to us, and
7 we will adjust it. I don't want anyone
8 to feel that they will not get the credit
9 that they deserve.

10 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Okay.
11 Thank you. And I can say -- I think a
12 lot of us feel this way -- we have
13 confidence in the job you're doing there,
14 Commissioner.

15 The Chair recognizes Councilman
16 Goode.

17 COUNCILMAN GOODE: Thank you,
18 Mr. Chairman.

19 Good morning, Commissioner.

20 COMMISSIONER TOLSON: Good
21 morning.

22 COUNCILMAN GOODE: First,
23 congratulations on the increases in
24 collections. Otherwise, I'm just
25 actually looking for an update on the CDC

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 Tax Credit Program. Recently, there were
3 open slots and I'm wondering how many
4 were filled.

5 COMMISSIONER TOLSON: The CDC
6 Tax Credit Program? One second, sir.

7 One second, sir. We'll give
8 you that data.

9 (Witness approached witness
10 table.)

11 MR. AFESSA: The question is
12 how many --

13 COUNCILMAN GOODE: There were
14 recently open slots. How many of those
15 slots were filled?

16 MR. AFESSA: Five new slots are
17 open because of expiration of the first
18 ten years.

19 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Sir,
20 before you go further, could you just
21 identify yourself for the record.

22 MR. AFESSA: Oh, I'm sorry. My
23 name is Tilahun Afessa. I'm the Director
24 of Policy in the Revenue Department.

25 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Thank

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 you.

3 MR. AFESSA: Five new slots are
4 open, and we have received seven new
5 applications for the five new slots.

6 COUNCILMAN GOODE: So there's
7 seven new applications for the five
8 slots, but those slots are not filled
9 yet.

10 MR. AFESSA: Not yet. So what
11 happened is, out of the seven, six were
12 received timely, because it is first
13 come, first-served basis. So the six are
14 going to be considered, and out of the
15 six, four of them are CDCs and two of
16 them are intermediaries. So basically
17 the four are already in it without any
18 lottery pick. So the two intermediaries
19 are received in the same day, so --

20 COUNCILMAN GOODE: You're
21 deciding between them.

22 MR. AFESSA: Yes. So one of
23 the two will be in based on -- the first
24 thing is review of the application. If
25 both of them qualify under the

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 intermediary qualification, then one will
3 be picked based on the lottery system.

4 COUNCILMAN GOODE: Are there
5 any other open slots at this time other
6 than the five?

7 MR. AFESSA: Not yet.

8 COUNCILMAN GOODE: When will
9 new slots open up and how many?

10 MR. AFESSA: I don't have the
11 numbers at this point, but there are more
12 or less on a yearly basis the ones which
13 have been there for the last ten years
14 will expire and then we'll have the same
15 process. We open it up for new
16 applicants and then we will go through
17 that process when the time comes.

18 COUNCILMAN GOODE: So do we
19 know how many total partnerships there
20 are at this time?

21 MR. AFESSA: Forty-two,
22 including the two HELs initiative
23 credits, the HELs credit. So we have 42
24 in that credit program.

25 COUNCILMAN GOODE: So in terms

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 of pending applications, there will be
3 one application that was late?

4 MR. AFESSA: There is one
5 application which has some problems.
6 We're trying to resolve it. Once that is
7 done, maybe that particular
8 participant -- if that participant is
9 out, then we'll advertise it again for
10 one slot, and then that will --

11 COUNCILMAN GOODE: And there's
12 one non-profit intermediary that will
13 lose out.

14 MR. AFESSA: Yes.

15 COUNCILMAN GOODE: So there are
16 potentially two applicants that won't
17 have slots.

18 MR. AFESSA: Yes.

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

21 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Thank
22 you, Councilman.

23 In the detail there's an
24 appropriation for about \$32,000 for a
25 parking tax study. Can you detail a

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 little bit of what the purpose of that
3 study is.

4 COMMISSIONER TOLSON: Yes,
5 Councilman. A couple of years ago we
6 were in collaboration with -- I'm not
7 sure of the exact name, but Parking
8 Association. They shared with us a study
9 that had been done on their behalf which
10 included a lot of parking lots or garages
11 where they had concerns about whether or
12 not these locations were paying taxes.
13 We did an investigation of each and every
14 one of those to find out where the
15 problem was, and unfortunately a lot of
16 it was there was -- I shouldn't say
17 unfortunately. From their perspective.
18 The garages were in compliance, so --

19 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: They were
20 in compliance?

21 COMMISSIONER TOLSON: Most of
22 them were in compliance.

23 As followup to that, though, we
24 had a separate study done or we're having
25 a separate study done that is evaluating

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2 our parking lots to try to do some audits
3 for us to tell us where might it be best
4 for us to allocate our resources for
5 additional audits and assessments of
6 activity. So there's a private firm
7 that's going to go through and do some
8 work for us in that stead.

9 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: It is
10 interesting because I remember sitting
11 here and hearing that testimony, that
12 there was all these parking lots not
13 paying money, but you found that, for the
14 most part, was not accurate.

15 COMMISSIONER TOLSON: That's
16 correct. It was not accurate.

17 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Okay.

18 COMMISSIONER TOLSON: But we
19 did investigate each and every one.

20 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Thank
21 you.

22 Just one other thing. In
23 talking about staff and vacancies, you
24 say in your written testimony 96 staff --
25 out of the current 96 budgeted staff and

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 vacancies, 74 will be filled by the end
3 of the fiscal year?

4 COMMISSIONER TOLSON: That's
5 correct.

6 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Are there
7 plans on hiring the other additional?

8 COMMISSIONER TOLSON: Yes, sir.
9 Yes, sir. But we are absolutely certain
10 that those will happen in short order,
11 probably within the next few weeks, and
12 the others are important and critical.

13 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: On the
14 plan, okay. Thank you.

15 Councilwoman Bass.

16 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Thank you.
17 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

18 Good morning.

19 COMMISSIONER TOLSON: Good
20 morning.

21 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: How are
22 you?

23 COMMISSIONER TOLSON: Very
24 good. Thank you.

25 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Good.

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.

2 I have a question for you about
3 the Conservatorship Act and the fact that
4 it was developed to be a tool to be
5 helpful to our communities to address
6 properties that are blighted, that are
7 neglected, that people seemingly have
8 pretty much walked away from. And so
9 we've had a great success with some
10 properties and then we've had -- for
11 example, OARC in the West Oak Lane
12 section has done great work through the
13 conservatorship laws, but we have some
14 situations now where other non-profits
15 that are trying to duplicate that to
16 improve their community and to get rid of
17 these blighted properties through
18 rehabbing them, getting them back on the
19 market, and getting a family into the
20 neighborhood. One of the problems we've
21 had is that we've seen a push from
22 Revenue to push those properties into
23 Sheriff Sale.

24 And so I wanted to see what we
25 could do or what your thoughts were about

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2 that and is there a way that we could
3 avoid that from happening, because it
4 basically holds up the process of keeping
5 this property -- getting this property
6 into the hands of a family, someone in
7 the neighborhood, a property improved,
8 greatly improved, improvement for the
9 entire community.

10 COMMISSIONER TOLSON: Yes.
11 Thank you, Councilwoman. I think that as
12 a department, we are refining our
13 perspective with regard to our
14 involvement with not just collections,
15 but with other public policy issues, and
16 certainly this one with regard to how
17 vacant property is used, we understand
18 that we have a role in that and to
19 support it.

20 In particular, I think that the
21 use of the Sheriff Sale is a process to
22 force a property to hopefully viable use
23 is one that we use when all else fails
24 with regard to property owner or payment
25 of taxes.

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2 I think that our need is to
3 work closely with Council and with others
4 to make sure that we're properly managing
5 some of the properties so that we can
6 avoid Sheriff Sales, but not instead
7 allow even community groups to hold
8 property that's vacant --

9 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: I agree.

10 COMMISSIONER TOLSON: -- or
11 blighted. So sometimes I think that
12 we've got to be clear maybe to Council, a
13 little clearer to Council about how we
14 are scheduling things, but maybe they
15 will not be as fast-tracked as others
16 will be fast-tracked, but at the same
17 hand, they're on the schedule such that
18 if a group falls down or does not do what
19 they need to do to a property, we will be
20 in position to move on it.

21 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: That will
22 be great. If there was some way to have
23 some checks in place so that before
24 Revenue decided to move on a particular
25 piece of property, maybe checking in with

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 the Council office who would know if
3 there's something going on with it or
4 there are different ways to find out, if
5 there's been conservatorship applied to
6 this particular property, I'm sure. So
7 whatever ways that we can do that, it
8 really would help us speed up the process
9 and make sure that we get this property
10 addressed, which many times has been
11 vacant for a very long, long time and
12 people want to see something done and it
13 really could spur some economic
14 development in the neighborhood. So I'm
15 really glad to hear that your office is
16 willing to work on that.

17 COMMISSIONER TOLSON: Yes.

18 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Thank you.

19 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

20 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Thank
21 you, Councilwoman.

22 Councilwoman Tasco.

23 COUNCILWOMAN TASCO: Thank you.

24 Very briefly. Thank you very
25 much for the work you're doing, and I

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 really appreciate your office and your
3 concern about what happens in the
4 neighborhoods, and I just want to
5 piggyback on what Councilwoman Bass said
6 about the conservatorship program.

7 I have the famous Lakeys on
8 Stenton Avenue. We couldn't -- very
9 difficult dealing with that property. It
10 went to Sheriff Sale and they're still
11 not -- it's just still sitting there. So
12 they may be paying the taxes, but if we
13 could have gotten it under the
14 conservatorship, then OARC could have
15 done something with it, as we did with
16 the old Arties on Ogontz Avenue.

17 So it's important, and I
18 appreciate the fact that you want to
19 collaborate with us, because we're there
20 every day in the neighborhood, we know
21 what's going on, we know the groups, and
22 then we can develop a plan, an action
23 plan, that would at the end of the day
24 get rid of the blighted property and
25 benefit the neighborhood. So that's very

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2 important. The tax collection just can't
3 be the end all or be all what is going to
4 happen to the building or the house or
5 whatever and what impact will the action
6 taken will impact on the neighborhood.
7 So I appreciate your willingness to work
8 with us, because it's very important.

9 COMMISSIONER TOLSON:
10 Certainly.

11 COUNCILWOMAN TASCO: Thank you.

12 COMMISSIONER TOLSON: Thank
13 you.

14 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Thank
15 you, Councilwoman.

16 Seeing no further questions,
17 thank you, Commissioner. Thank you for
18 all you've done.

19 COMMISSIONER TOLSON: Thank
20 you.

21 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Our next
22 department is the Board of Revision of
23 Taxes.

24 (Witness approached witness
25 table.)

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.

2 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Good
3 morning.

4 MS. PAGAN: Good morning.

5 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Please
6 identify yourself for the record and
7 proceed.

8 MS. PAGAN: My name is Carla
9 Pagan, Executive Director of the Board of
10 Revision of Taxes. I'm here today to
11 testify on the 2015 fiscal year Operating
12 Budget.

13 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Good
14 morning.

15 MS. PAGAN: And I know you all
16 have our summary, so I'd like to address
17 questions, but before I go into
18 questions, I just want to share with you
19 our main accomplishments of the year.

20 Since the Council bill passed
21 last month, our appeal hearings have
22 increased from about three to five
23 sessions a week to 14 sessions a week.
24 So that's good news to report. And we're
25 hearing approximately 660 cases a week

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 that we were before at 150 a week. So
3 that's good news. So I'm pleased to
4 report that the appeal volume, we're
5 moving it down much quicker than before.

6 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Okay.
7 That's very short and sweet. Thank you.

8 MS. PAGAN: Yes.

9 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: On that
10 same vein, in the written testimony you
11 state the Department requests an
12 additional 93,000 for FY15 to finish
13 hearing the appeals caseload.

14 MS. PAGAN: Yes.

15 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Is that
16 increase expected to be sufficient to
17 hear the increase of appeals?

18 MS. PAGAN: Yes. Most of the
19 increase that we got in the 2014 budget
20 to hear the appeals we spent bulking up
21 our supplies and getting some new
22 equipment. It's the Class 100 funds that
23 we may need additional money for Fiscal
24 Year '15 just to help cover temporary
25 staff employees.

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.

2 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Okay.

3 And what's the expected timetable to
4 finish? I mean, do you have a target
5 time?

6 MS. PAGAN: Now we hope to be
7 finished residential appeals at least by
8 Labor Day at the very latest and then go
9 right -- we're hearing certain
10 commercial, industrial cases now, but,
11 yeah, the goal is to have all residential
12 cases heard and decided at least by the
13 end of September.

14 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: And could
15 you tell us -- I'm just interested in
16 this. The appeals that have been heard
17 so far, are the people coming in with
18 arguments based basically on the market
19 value or is it kind of based on different
20 things, like I've lived here so long and
21 I shouldn't have to pay more taxes kind
22 of thing? I'm just trying to feel out
23 the basis of the appeals.

24 MS. PAGAN: And it really
25 depends on what part of the City we're

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.

2 hearing that day, but it seems that most
3 are actually arguing about value, but not
4 that they disagree that the sales on
5 their block have been that value, but
6 perhaps their argument that their house
7 is not to the condition that the high
8 sale houses are from. So they do want to
9 be lowered, because they've been there 50
10 years and they might not have the central
11 air or the rehabbed kitchens and
12 bathrooms.

13 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Well,
14 that certainly is a legitimate argument.

15 MS. PAGAN: Yes. Right. It
16 is.

17 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Okay.
18 That's the kind of thing I'm getting at.

19 And you may have said this.
20 I'm sorry. How many appeals have been
21 heard to date; do you know?

22 MS. PAGAN: So we've heard
23 about 6,000 to date.

24 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Six
25 thousand, really? Okay. And the average

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 daily caseload is how many? I'm sorry.
3 You might have said this.

4 MS. PAGAN: So with the
5 increase in our hearing session now, two
6 days a week we spend doing all non-oral
7 cases where the Board has done the prep
8 work and we're putting those decisions on
9 record, and then three days of the week
10 we're hearing a combination of oral cases
11 and non-oral cases. So total it comes to
12 14 sessions and about 600 cases a week.
13 So that 600 is comprised of about 300
14 oral and another 300 non-oral cases.

15 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: And a lot
16 of people are just putting in non-oral
17 requests?

18 MS. PAGAN: It seems that -- we
19 had several thousand non-oral appeals,
20 yes, and it seems that now that tax bills
21 have gone out, the homestead, they can
22 see the change, some people have even
23 gotten LOOP applications granted, they
24 don't want to come in or they just want
25 the Board to review it for administrative

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 review and make a decision.

3 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Or maybe
4 even drop the appeal.

5 MS. PAGAN: Or even withdraw
6 their appeal, yes.

7 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Thank
8 you.

9 Councilman Jones.

10 COUNCILMAN JONES: Thank you,
11 Mr. Chairman.

12 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: You're
13 welcome, sir.

14 COUNCILMAN JONES: A couple of
15 quick questions, and thank you for the
16 daunting task your department did with
17 the whole AVI issue. One of the quick
18 questions I would have is on tangled
19 title issues, which in some of our older
20 communities what happens is grand-mom had
21 the house, one of the children inherited
22 it, did not do the paperwork, and now
23 they're in the third generation of
24 ownership and that has caused a great
25 deal of angst and also complications by

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 way of relief efforts and things like
3 that.

4 Have you experienced that, A,
5 and what are some of the remedies for
6 that for the public? And I kind of know,
7 but I'd like you to put it out there.

8 MS. PAGAN: Yes. We do
9 experience that at the Board hearing
10 level also, but since taxpayers come in
11 and testify on the record who they are
12 and what their relation is to the
13 property, the Board is much more lenient
14 to letting them testify. So we do go in
15 detail on our website who can actually
16 file an appeal. So all those issues of
17 tangled title are included. So there's
18 no restrictions to them filing an appeal
19 or coming before the Board for an oral
20 hearing session or a non-oral.

21 So it's actually -- if you do
22 have a tangled title situation, it's much
23 easier to file an appeal than for maybe
24 your homestead application.

25 COUNCILMAN JONES: And so we're

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 now beginning to -- people kind of didn't
3 believe AVI, whatever happened, and a lot
4 of people did not receive, even though we
5 did billboards, went door to door, did
6 mailings, they still refused to believe
7 that this would ever some day come to be.

8 MS. PAGAN: Yes.

9 COUNCILMAN JONES: Is your
10 office still open to doing workshops,
11 which you did in the beginning, going out
12 and talking to the public about
13 one-on-one issues dealing with individual
14 households and individual appeals and
15 individual assessments?

16 MS. PAGAN: Yes, we are open.
17 It does seem, though, as people -- that
18 period since the appeal filing deadline
19 is before the tax bill arrives at
20 someone's home, that learning curve is
21 mostly addressed either at the hearing or
22 before it actually comes to a hearing.
23 So before when the first AVI notices went
24 out, you know, it's question marks and no
25 one knows how to respond or what it

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 really means. So then as tax bills went
3 out, people could see their homestead,
4 LOOP applications came through, they were
5 accepted and granted. By the time they
6 get to the hearing, most people are
7 informed, or if they were in denial, once
8 they got their tax bill, there was a
9 sudden realization.

10 So we'll see a lot of those
11 people in the hearing room between now
12 and the end of the year. We do have a
13 high number of what we call nunc pro tunc
14 petitions where people filed late even
15 after 30 days after they got their tax
16 bill. So we will continue to hear those
17 arguments from people even in the 2015,
18 those late appeal filers. So a lot of
19 their questions usually get answered
20 during the appeal process.

21 But, yes, we are open to
22 community workshops too.

23 COUNCILMAN JONES: The reason I
24 mention that, particularly seniors who
25 may be in a position where they can't get

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 far, don't want to go far, need to be, in
3 my opinion, accommodated. Particularly
4 in some of our older neighborhoods where
5 you have a lot of growth activity going
6 on, they're the ill-informed victims of
7 that prosperity, and we really need to
8 dig down. And I would say that we've
9 done a good first brush of this, but
10 there are pockets of people, pockets of
11 communities that probably just didn't get
12 the memo, and we really need to drill
13 down to them. And I will be reaching out
14 to my colleagues to figure out where we
15 can do a second round of those types of
16 outreaches, Mr. Chairman, to see if we
17 can't save every taxpayer we can.

18 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE:

19 Absolutely.

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

22 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Thank
23 you, Councilman.

24 Councilwoman Bass.

25 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Thank you.

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.

2 Hi, Carla. How are you?

3 MS. PAGAN: Good. Thank you.

4 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Good.

5 So I have a question for you in
6 reference to a couple of calls that our
7 office had received from properties that
8 are sort of being taxed now that were
9 not -- let me see, how should I say.
10 Originally they were non-profits.
11 Somehow along the way the City said
12 you're no longer a non-profit, we can't
13 find your paperwork or something
14 happened, and then suddenly the City no
15 longer recognized that they were a
16 non-profit and sent them tax bills for
17 the past two, three, four, five, ten
18 years. And I notice that it's happened a
19 number of times, and it seems as if we
20 come to some sort of a settlement where
21 we say, Okay, well, the City will take --
22 just give us the tax bill for the last
23 couple of years and we'll forget the
24 rest. And so I wanted to see if you had
25 any thoughts on that. I know that we've

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 communicated somewhat about it.

3 MS. PAGAN: Yes. We found that
4 a lot of the appeal filings are from
5 previously properties that have the
6 non-profit exemption or there may be
7 church parking lots or the tax bill may
8 have been \$50 and no one cared about it
9 and suddenly it's \$800 or \$1,800. So the
10 assessment office has seen a rise of
11 applications for non-profit real estate
12 tax status.

13 So once those applications go
14 to the OPA, get processed and approved,
15 if that property owner also has previous
16 years that need to be addressed, the
17 Board does hear those cases that may
18 address 2013, 2012, 2011. And if the
19 Board grants that non-profit exemption
20 from past years, then their tax bill will
21 be wiped away.

22 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: How does it
23 happen, though, that -- let's say if I'm
24 the Cindy Bass Foundation and have been
25 for 20 years, and somewhere along the way

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 it may have come up that you no longer
3 recognize this foundation. Can you talk
4 a little bit about that?

5 MS. PAGAN: Yes. We see it
6 happen most commonly. So when there's
7 deed changes, so maybe you were the Cindy
8 Bass Foundation and in 2017 you get new
9 partners and it becomes the Cindy Bass
10 and John Allen Foundation. Once that new
11 deed is recorded, that deed recording
12 goes to the assessment office and they
13 think, Oh, there's a new ownership, let's
14 remove that tax exemption.

15 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: So there's
16 some changes in the formation or the
17 recognition of the organization?

18 MS. PAGAN: Yes. And even a
19 lot of churches, they could add "worship"
20 to the end of their name, do a new deed,
21 and they lose their non-profit status.

22 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: So any
23 little change can trigger that sort of
24 issue with the City?

25 MS. PAGAN: Yes.

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2 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: All right.

3 Okay. Thank you.

4 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Thank
5 you, Councilwoman.

6 Councilman Oh, please.

7 COUNCILMAN OH: Thank you very
8 much, Mr. Chairman.

9 Good morning.

10 MS. PAGAN: Good morning.

11 COUNCILMAN OH: First question
12 is that I see that you are -- you have
13 two temporary masters and you're
14 expecting two more; is that correct?

15 MS. PAGAN: Yes. So we have
16 two masters that just came on board this
17 month, and we actually have interviews
18 for two more this week.

19 COUNCILMAN OH: And where do
20 you draw your pool of interviewees from?

21 MS. PAGAN: You know, honestly,
22 I don't know. The Board -- these are all
23 referrals or recommendations that came to
24 the Board. So they actually hired the
25 masters, where I hired the other office

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 temporary staff.

3 COUNCILMAN OH: Do you know
4 what that process is? I mean, in
5 general, do you know what the process is.

6 MS. PAGAN: For temp staff or
7 masters specifically?

8 COUNCILMAN OH: For masters in
9 particular.

10 MS. PAGAN: So for masters, we
11 did have to go -- two weeks ago I went to
12 the Civil Service Commission to get
13 approval to hire those masters since most
14 of them are counsel, and once you get
15 that Civil Service waiver, then they can
16 come on board to the Department to work a
17 temporary term. So our masters will be
18 working a short term of six months each.

19 COUNCILMAN OH: And must they
20 be licensed attorneys?

21 MS. PAGAN: They don't have to
22 be. The Board did consider looking at
23 attorneys, even some real estate
24 professionals. What they found is that
25 the attorneys were able to negotiate with

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 the taxpayers better and offer answers to
3 those other questions that weren't
4 necessarily real estate driven.

5 COUNCILMAN OH: Okay. I wonder
6 are there any employees that are, for
7 example, Latino or Asian American and has
8 your office reached out to those sources?

9 MS. PAGAN: Yeah. We only had
10 one -- our normal staff is so small, and
11 the temp staff that came this year was a
12 combination minority, non-minority. We
13 had one Hispanic employee. We've never
14 had an Asian employee actually.

15 COUNCILMAN OH: Okay. The
16 other thing is in the course of reviewing
17 the appeals, have you found any patterns
18 of neighborhoods that seem to have a lot
19 of challenges or where it looks like they
20 were overassessed?

21 MS. PAGAN: Yes. Every year
22 you can clearly see a pattern of the
23 appeal filers based on their location in
24 the City. I haven't seen an area that's
25 particularly overassessed, because the

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 assessments do match the recent sales
3 prices, but like Councilmember Jones was
4 saying, if that area is comprised of a
5 lot of senior citizens or long-term
6 homeowners, they could be feeling the
7 shock more, and perhaps their houses are
8 overassessed, not because the
9 neighborhood sales don't drive it, but
10 because the condition of their properties
11 are not where the highest sales in the
12 neighborhood are. So, yeah, you do see
13 trends in different parts of the City.

14 COUNCILMAN OH: Could you give
15 us some examples where there may be high
16 property values based on sales, but the
17 condition of the homes are actually
18 rather poor and don't appear to match the
19 values? Do you have areas specifically
20 that you have come across?

21 MS. PAGAN: Sure. Perhaps in
22 the Temple University area, there's a lot
23 of long-term owner-occupants that have
24 been there, raised their grandchildren
25 there, and then they're living next door

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 to perhaps an owner or a landlord or
3 investor that's bought 20 properties in
4 the neighborhood at very low value,
5 rehabbed 20 of them, and then experience
6 very high rental incomes from Temple
7 students. So you have to make an
8 adjustment for that long-term
9 owner-occupant and the person that's
10 generating the heavy rent roll. And
11 sometimes you know that. If the
12 investors took out permits, then you can
13 spot it very easily, and then sometimes
14 you can't tell one homeowner from the
15 other. So you do want people to appeal
16 to come out and share that with us.

17 COUNCILMAN OH: So is it
18 possible for your office to share with
19 Council, and I'm sure the District
20 Councilpeople in particular, any
21 particular neighborhoods where that may
22 be the case so that we're aware of it as
23 it develops?

24 MS. PAGAN: Sure. Sure.

25 COUNCILMAN OH: All right.

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.

2 Thank you very much.

3 Thank you, Chairman.

4 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Thank
5 you, Councilman.

6 I would think just off the top
7 of my head an area like Point Breeze
8 would be an area. I'm familiar with the
9 area of Francisville, which is near me.
10 I would think they would also be areas
11 that would kind of be what Councilman Oh
12 is talking about there.

13 MS. PAGAN: Well, yes. All the
14 parts of the City that experienced the
15 gentrification and the housing boom, yes.
16 They're hit pretty hard.

17 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Sure.
18 Thank you.

19 Councilman Henon.

20 COUNCILMAN HENON: Thank you,
21 Mr. Chair.

22 Good morning.

23 MS. PAGAN: Good morning.

24 COUNCILMAN HENON: Thank you
25 for coming in. I just wanted to follow

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 up on the trend, the question of trends.
3 Could you provide to the Chair
4 a list of all the trends that you've
5 discovered through the process of your
6 appeals, whether a certain neighborhood,
7 the type of properties, the years of the
8 property, is it a certain characteristic
9 of the property that would be noticeably
10 trending for the -- an increase or a
11 decrease in the property values.

12 MS. PAGAN: Sure. Just keep in
13 mind, it's our opinion, because we do
14 find that the arguments are similar in
15 some neighborhoods, and that's how we
16 come up with these trends. But sure.

17 COUNCILMAN HENON: That's fine.
18 I mean, I think my colleagues have asked
19 the question succinctly. So I appreciate
20 that.

21 Are you keeping -- obviously
22 you're keeping records of the outcomes of
23 all the appeals?

24 MS. PAGAN: Yes, we do have
25 that record.

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.

2 COUNCILMAN HENON: And as this
3 process goes along, when you get caught
4 up to date, would they be available?

5 MS. PAGAN: Sure. Yes.

6 COUNCILMAN HENON: You had
7 mentioned the nunc pro tunc petitions.

8 MS. PAGAN: Yes.

9 COUNCILMAN HENON: How many of
10 them? And I understand why so many, but
11 what is the reasoning why they are
12 petitioning in that fashion?

13 MS. PAGAN: So usually we might
14 see a couple hundred nunc pro tunc
15 petitions yearly just for the people that
16 may have ignored their assessment notice
17 and don't even respond until their tax
18 bill comes. So those people have filed
19 again. And that number is probably
20 amplified because their bill is going up
21 much higher this year than in previous
22 years. So a lot of people are saying
23 that maybe they didn't get their mail
24 when that AVI mailing went out. And I
25 don't know how much returned mail the OPA

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 had this year, but most people say they
3 didn't get a copy of that notice, so
4 they're responding based on their tax
5 bill and nothing else.

6 COUNCILMAN HENON: And you
7 obviously see a more than average --

8 MS. PAGAN: Yes.

9 COUNCILMAN HENON: -- amount of
10 petitions?

11 MS. PAGAN: Yes.

12 COUNCILMAN HENON: Okay. Would
13 you be able to at a certain -- can they
14 file that petition at any time?

15 MS. PAGAN: They can, yes. The
16 petition nunc pro tunc is simply Latin
17 for now -- so I'm filing now for then.
18 So it really is a late filed application
19 that you can take at any time.

20 COUNCILMAN HENON: Okay. So at
21 a certain point again, would you be able
22 to provide to the Chair what the
23 likelihood of the amount that was
24 successful in their petition --

25 MS. PAGAN: Yes.

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.

2 COUNCILMAN HENON: -- for
3 appeal and the cost for the BRT time and
4 any kind of legal expenses that occurred
5 throughout the whole process?

6 MS. PAGAN: Yes.

7 COUNCILMAN HENON: Which is an
8 ongoing process, I understand.

9 MS. PAGAN: Yes, it will be.

10 COUNCILMAN HENON: My last
11 question is, I had a couple constituents
12 who because of the backlog with OPA they
13 didn't have a response to their
14 first-level review, and by the time they
15 did hear some kind of response, they had
16 the appeal from BRT, and then they have
17 two different, quite different, in some
18 cases drastic, in the amount of like
19 \$15,000 apart, two different types of
20 conclusions.

21 Is there -- it just brings up
22 kind of the questions on how we -- are we
23 doing something different when you're
24 taking a look at the reassessment from
25 the BRT as from OPA or -- I mean, are

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 they supposed to be similar or off of
3 national standards? And I know we've
4 heard that over and over and over again,
5 but what we haven't heard up until this
6 point is how you're getting two
7 conflicting conclusions.

8 MS. PAGAN: Okay. So first I
9 want to say one different thing the Board
10 is doing this year for those people that
11 had first-level review applications that
12 weren't decided by our filing deadline,
13 we did accept those appeals that were
14 technically late, but we took them in as
15 timely. And when people got those
16 decisions, some were reduced, but then
17 they said they still want to keep a Board
18 appeal open because they wanted further
19 reduction.

20 But usually what we've seen is
21 that the Board's decisions typically come
22 close to perhaps what the first-level
23 review application may have. If not, the
24 Board is typically lower. Sometimes the
25 taxpayer may send zero to a couple of

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 supporting documents with their
3 first-level review, and perhaps if that
4 got denied or just reduced not to their
5 satisfaction, they may have sent
6 additional documents in for their hearing
7 or presented new testimony that would
8 support a further reduction. So that's
9 usually how that may happen, but from
10 what we've seen, the Board is usually
11 pretty close.

12 COUNCILMAN HENON: So if we
13 happen to have a situation like that, we
14 just contact one of the two, I guess, the
15 latter of --

16 MS. PAGAN: Yes. If you run
17 into that --

18 COUNCILMAN HENON: -- of the
19 appeals?

20 MS. PAGAN: Yes. I would say
21 contact us, because the Board did also
22 agree that if in fact a Board decision
23 comes in higher than a late decision on a
24 first-level review, that the Board
25 would -- they wouldn't override a lower

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 value. They would accept the lowest
3 decision.

4 COUNCILMAN HENON: Perfect.

5 MS. PAGAN: So it's to benefit
6 the homeowner.

7 COUNCILMAN HENON: Absolutely.
8 Going through the fair process --

9 MS. PAGAN: Yes. It's only
10 fair.

11 COUNCILMAN HENON: -- that they
12 have experienced.

13 Great. Thank you for your
14 time.

15 I have no further questions.

16 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Thank
17 you, Councilman.

18 Councilman Goode.

19 COUNCILMAN GOODE: Thank you,
20 Mr. Chair.

21 This is actually a followup to
22 Councilman Oh's line of questioning. I
23 just thought of a few questions.

24 How long have you been at the
25 BRT?

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.

2 MS. PAGAN: I've been with the
3 City seven years. So I was with the old
4 BRT before the new BRT. So the new BRT
5 has been around since 2010.

6 COUNCILMAN GOODE: I'm speaking
7 of the old BRT.

8 MS. PAGAN: So since 2007.

9 COUNCILMAN GOODE: So the old
10 BRT used to administer the tax abatement
11 program?

12 MS. PAGAN: Yes, and they still
13 do. Well, now it's the OPA, correct.

14 COUNCILMAN GOODE: But the old
15 BRT used to administer it directly?

16 MS. PAGAN: Yes.

17 COUNCILMAN GOODE: And when the
18 old BRT was administering that program,
19 did you find that it was impacting the
20 assessment process particularly for
21 properties that were in close proximity
22 to tax-abated properties? Was it driving
23 up assessments under the old BRT?

24 MS. PAGAN: No, I wouldn't say
25 so. And if it did drive assessments, it

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 wasn't the abatement program that drove
3 the assessments. It's that people were
4 renovating properties, taking them from
5 nominal or low value and then
6 rehabilitating them so their values --

7 COUNCILMAN GOODE: I'm actually
8 not speaking of tax-abated properties,
9 but properties that are in close
10 proximity to tax-abated properties.

11 MS. PAGAN: Well, so yes and
12 no. Sales is the number one factor that
13 changes value.

14 COUNCILMAN GOODE: Now it does.

15 MS. PAGAN: Well, it was back
16 then too. It should -- that's how it
17 always should be.

18 COUNCILMAN GOODE: That's how
19 it should have been. I'm not questioning
20 whether it was that way or not. I'm
21 actually trying to actually start a
22 discussion of pre-OPA and post-OPA in
23 terms of the impact of tax abatement on
24 assessments. I'm trying to have an
25 honest discussion about that.

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.

2 So under the old BRT, were
3 values greatly impacted by the tax
4 abatement program if you were in
5 proximity to a tax-abated property?

6 MS. PAGAN: So then I'd have to
7 say no.

8 COUNCILMAN GOODE: Under the
9 new BRT, are properties greatly impacted
10 by being in proximity to a tax-abated
11 property?

12 MS. PAGAN: So under OPA's AVI,
13 if those abated properties have sold,
14 then yes.

15 COUNCILMAN GOODE: Okay. So is
16 there a difference in the appeal process
17 between the old BRT and the new BRT in
18 terms of whether you take into
19 consideration how the tax abatement
20 program has impacted the assessment of
21 properties that are in proximity to
22 tax-abated properties?

23 MS. PAGAN: So, no, there's no
24 new appeal process regarding that piece.
25 And the values of non-abated properties

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 in close proximity to abated properties
3 typically would not impact value unless
4 there's actually a sale of them.

5 COUNCILMAN GOODE: So did
6 properties in proximity to tax-abated
7 properties receive an extra jump
8 post-OPA?

9 MS. PAGAN: Pre-AVI?

10 COUNCILMAN GOODE: Post-AVI.

11 MS. PAGAN: So post-AVI, I
12 would probably say yes if that abated
13 property sold. So if it was one of those
14 abatement programs where it was rehabbed
15 and then sold to a new homeowner, then
16 yes. If it was one of those abatements
17 where I was the homeowner and put a new
18 addition on the back but never sold my
19 house, then no.

20 COUNCILMAN GOODE: So I'm just
21 curious and just for the record, is that
22 taken into consideration at all in terms
23 of the appeal process now?

24 MS. PAGAN: Yes. So when the
25 Board looks at people's appeals and

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 perhaps they may have all of us on the
3 same street, I've been in my house for 60
4 years, old kitchen, maybe you bought your
5 house a couple months ago, rehabbed with
6 a ten-year tax abatement, and then
7 there's someone in the middle, the Board
8 does look at the range of values of all
9 those property -- same properties, same
10 block, different conditions. So they
11 should be within a range, and the Board
12 does consider that low range and high
13 range.

14 COUNCILMAN GOODE: And how many
15 situations have you come upon in terms of
16 appeals so far?

17 MS. PAGAN: Well, that's one of
18 those trends maybe that we went over
19 before. It happens a lot where in those
20 neighborhoods that have seen a lot of
21 sales or a lot of gentrification or
22 improvement of real estate.

23 COUNCILMAN GOODE: And what's
24 generally happening in terms of the first
25 review by OPA? Are they taking that into

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 consideration? Because when I questioned
3 them about it, they say they don't take
4 into consideration whether there's an
5 abated property close to it when they do
6 the initial assessment, but they did not
7 say what they do upon first review in
8 terms of whether they take it into
9 consideration then. I doubt that they
10 do, but I can't speak for them.

11 So the question is, is the BRT
12 taking that into consideration? Does
13 that affect and change your position on
14 whether you generally accept what OPA
15 does in terms of first review?

16 MS. PAGAN: Well, I'm going to
17 go back a minute. The abatement is not
18 the real driver. It's not that driving
19 factor --

20 COUNCILMAN GOODE: It's the
21 sale.

22 MS. PAGAN: -- whether you have
23 an abatement or not. It's the actual
24 sale. So that's probably why the OPA is
25 saying it wasn't a factor that would

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.

2 impact AVI. It shouldn't unless that --

3 COUNCILMAN GOODE: I get that.

4 The question is, what is BRT doing in
5 terms of appeals on properties that were
6 not necessarily at full value before AVI,
7 were not necessarily impacted by the tax
8 abatement program in the same way, but
9 are impacted by the tax abatement program
10 through sales? Is the Board taking that
11 into consideration on appeals?

12 MS. PAGAN: Yes. So, again,
13 the Board will look at a range. One of
14 the very useful reports that the Board
15 has before going into a hearing or when
16 they're reviewing cases, for short we
17 just call it the Block Report, but it
18 allows you to see every single house on a
19 block, the recent sales on the block, and
20 it also gives the condition codes,
21 interior and exterior, and also the
22 building square feet and land square
23 feet. So then the Board can easily see,
24 Oh, this house here sold for half a
25 million, it was abated. The house next

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 door, maybe the taxpayer sent in photos,
3 old kitchen, old bath, no recent sales,
4 they can see that range of value. So,
5 yes, they take that into consideration.

6 COUNCILMAN GOODE: And so OPA
7 probably has higher revenue estimates
8 based upon their assessments than will be
9 realized after the appeals on those
10 properties; is that fair to say?

11 MS. PAGAN: I don't know for --
12 so, yes, it's a fair statement. I don't
13 know if OPA makes those projections or is
14 it generating more from the Finance
15 Department with the OPA. But, yes, I
16 know there is an allowance made for
17 appeals.

18 COUNCILMAN GOODE: So I guess
19 the question I'm asking in the end is,
20 are we going to lose money on appeals
21 because people are finally taking into
22 consideration how assessments are
23 impacted by proximity to tax-abated
24 properties that are sold?

25 MS. PAGAN: So will the City

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 lose money on appeals? There will be a
3 difference with the taxable dollar value
4 of all the assessments on record now
5 versus the taxable value of the dollar of
6 assessments after the 2014 appeal hearing
7 season is done.

8 COUNCILMAN GOODE: OPA says
9 that it has not yet taken into
10 consideration proximity to tax-abated
11 properties yet. They said that they have
12 experience and will look toward that in
13 the future.

14 To what extent is the BRT
15 taking that into consideration in terms
16 of the impact of tax-abated properties on
17 properties that are in close proximity,
18 and are there any numbers associated with
19 that?

20 MS. PAGAN: There's no numbers,
21 but when someone does appeal, they take
22 in all the factors into consideration, or
23 at least the factors that the person is
24 appealing about. Maybe it's because they
25 live next door to a house that sold for a

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 whole lot more than theirs is worth and
3 it has a tax abatement. So maybe their
4 argument is non-uniformity. So the Board
5 will make that consideration, and they'll
6 look at the numbers. Or maybe it's just
7 simply condition.

8 So it's -- I hear you saying
9 the impact of the abatement on the
10 values, but the abatement is just a piece
11 that may drive a bigger picture. So it's
12 not the abatement that's impacting the
13 neighbor's property. It's --

14 COUNCILMAN GOODE: It's the
15 abatement that caused the overvalue of
16 the property that's impacting it upon
17 sale.

18 MS. PAGAN: Of the abated
19 property or the house next door?

20 COUNCILMAN GOODE: Both.

21 MS. PAGAN: On the abated
22 property, yes, and on the house next
23 door, yes, if it's a sale on the block,
24 if that abated property has sold.

25 COUNCILMAN GOODE: See,

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 Councilman Oh was asking about the
3 sticker shock created in those
4 situations. I'm just asking whether
5 there's any analysis being done in terms
6 of how the Finance Department might have
7 fallen short because of what's going to
8 happen on appeal. And I understand how
9 to some extent that conversation is not
10 supposed to be had in terms of Finance
11 Department projections and BRT appeals.
12 I'm asking, does anyone know the number
13 or projection?

14 MS. PAGAN: Someone employed by
15 the City knows the number. I don't know
16 that number, but I know that number is
17 looked at yearly, what the tax roll is
18 off assessments and what that factor is
19 for appeals, yes.

20 COUNCILMAN GOODE: I'm speaking
21 specifically about appeals related to
22 those properties in proximity to
23 tax-abated properties that caused the
24 property to be overvalued and then sold
25 at a higher price than it should have.

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.

2 MS. PAGAN: So that's not
3 specifically looked at because -- so when
4 I hear you say cause the neighboring
5 property to be overvalued, well, perhaps.
6 So the house next door shouldn't be at
7 the same value as a newly rehabbed abated
8 property, but, yes, the house next door's
9 value will increase. So if I'm the worst
10 house on my block, the value of my house
11 will still rise if the sales on my block
12 are going up, even if I live in the worst
13 house.

14 COUNCILMAN GOODE: One more
15 question, Mr. Chair.

16 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Okay.
17 Councilman Jones is already giving me
18 dirty looks, but that's okay.

19 COUNCILMAN GOODE: The question
20 simply is, so from the way the Board is
21 approaching this, is it safe to say that
22 those long-term homeowners won't feel the
23 full impact until they sell their own
24 properties?

25 MS. PAGAN: Long-term

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 homeowners are going to feel impact if
3 the sales prices have risen in their
4 neighborhood. Yes, they will. If the
5 prices are rising in your neighborhood,
6 you're going to feel the impact. What
7 we're hearing is, Oh, great, and this is
8 why they're so ecstatic about LOOP. So
9 LOOP was a solution or remedy or help for
10 them, yes, but sure, long-term property
11 owners will feel it more.

12 COUNCILMAN GOODE: Okay. Thank
13 you, Mr. Chair.

14 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Thank
15 you, Councilman.

16 Councilman Jones.

17 COUNCILMAN JONES: Thank you,
18 Mr. Chairman, and thank you for your
19 timekeeper's promise.

20 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: I saw the
21 looks you were giving over here,
22 Councilman.

23 COUNCILMAN JONES: That's all
24 right.

25 Quick question. Number one, on

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 my colleague's line of questioning, it's
3 just my theory and I remember asking in
4 these Chambers to figure out what the
5 actual process it was that they were
6 using, and you had to have a Master's in
7 advanced math in order to understand it,
8 but in layperson's terms, if you have ten
9 houses on a block, three of them get
10 abatements and they put in \$200,000 worth
11 of improvements, the tipping point is not
12 at the point of the sale where people
13 start to speculate and start to pick up
14 two or three houses in anticipation of
15 getting that kind of profit windfall that
16 comes when a neighborhood is viewed as up
17 and coming. All you have to do is look
18 at what once was North Philly and is now
19 Brewerytown or look at parts of
20 neighboring areas in North Philly up and
21 around --

22 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: I'm
23 always going to mention Francisville,
24 Councilman.

25 COUNCILMAN JONES: No. I

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 wasn't going to do you like that.

3 But there are plenty of these
4 examples where these abatements do have
5 an immediate impact, even before sale,
6 because people see the investment going
7 into the area and say, Oh, it's hot.

8 Now, one would argue one way or
9 another if that's a good thing, but the
10 impact, the unintended consequence to the
11 neighbor living next door is dramatic.
12 We've had people come from around the
13 City and show us that they bought that
14 property 40 years ago and now are faced
15 with a tax bill that is more than the
16 original amount of the house. So whether
17 the chicken or the egg, which one came
18 first, the impact is still the same to
19 them, whether it's the point of sale or
20 point of abatement, and I think I would
21 agree with my colleague that it has a
22 dramatic impact.

23 So that wasn't my question, but
24 just my observation going through this.

25 The question I have is, we went

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 through AVI and we went and -- did we,
3 question, examine 90 percent of the
4 properties actually or would you claim a
5 hundred percent?

6 MS. PAGAN: When you say
7 examine?

8 COUNCILMAN JONES: Reassessed,
9 revalued, actual valued, whichever you'd
10 like.

11 MS. PAGAN: As far as I know,
12 the OPA --

13 COUNCILMAN JONES: This is not
14 a court of law.

15 MS. PAGAN: -- reassessed the
16 entire City, yes.

17 COUNCILMAN JONES: So my
18 question becomes, at what point in time
19 are we going to attempt to do that again
20 or is there a different methodology that
21 will be employed neighborhood by
22 neighborhood, sporadic sales by -- what
23 is your next phase of this to keep track
24 of what the actual values are?

25 MS. PAGAN: So I don't know.

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.

2 That's an OPA question.

3 COUNCILMAN JONES: That's fair.

4 MS. PAGAN: The OPA will set
5 that plan for the City.

6 COUNCILMAN JONES: They haven't
7 talked to you to give you a sense of here
8 we go again, it's getting ready to
9 happen, gear up kind of thing?

10 MS. PAGAN: We know it's not
11 happening for 2015, so I think everyone
12 took a sigh of relief. We'll see about
13 '16, but '16 conversations have not --
14 nothing is solidified yet.

15 COUNCILMAN JONES: Because one
16 good model in the criminal justice thing,
17 they have a CJAB, where the DA knows what
18 the Police Commissioner is doing, the
19 Police Commissioner knows what the Prison
20 Commissioner is doing, the Prison
21 Commissioner knows what the Defense
22 Attorneys are doing, because one impacts
23 the other.

24 MS. PAGAN: Yes.

25 COUNCILMAN JONES: Similarly,

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 you guys need to talk to each other so
3 that if I need to ramp up my staff to
4 deal with appeals or hire a different
5 type of personnel to deal with the
6 actions of another department, that's a
7 good model for you guys to follow so that
8 everyone is aware of the impacts of
9 decision, one department to another.

10 MS. PAGAN: So we do talk with
11 OPA a lot. We work very closely
12 together. So, yes, what they put out
13 directly impacts what our production will
14 be for the following year, and they do
15 share that with us. And then our
16 computer systems are so closely linked,
17 so we do communicate.

18 COUNCILMAN JONES: So when
19 you're in that room again, ask them what
20 their methodology is going to be so that
21 you can anticipate, so that we can
22 anticipate the fallback of this. Because
23 in some neighborhoods it's a lot more
24 drastic than others, and fortunately
25 everybody wasn't impacted.

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.

2 The second part of that
3 question is, in that second round, a
4 lot -- in my district, I believe the
5 figure was 69 percent of the homes either
6 stayed the same or even went down.

7 MS. PAGAN: Okay.

8 COUNCILMAN JONES: And that's
9 fine. Everybody didn't have that
10 experience, but if it means that the
11 second swing when you come back around
12 that sticker shock now hits the other
13 group, we need to be prepared for that as
14 well.

15 MS. PAGAN: Yes.

16 COUNCILMAN JONES: So that
17 methodology is critically important to
18 us. It took us, what, damn near a decade
19 to get our heart up to do this one, and
20 the tremors and shocks have been felt
21 around the City. So any anticipation of
22 that kind of thing so that we can learn
23 from the first time would be helpful.

24 MS. PAGAN: You'll probably
25 know before me, though, I think.

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.

2 COUNCILMAN JONES: All right.

3 I look forward to that.

4 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

5 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Thank

6 you, Councilman.

7 Councilman Oh and then

8 Councilman Johnson.

9 COUNCILMAN OH: All right.

10 Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

11 Just a quick question on nunc
12 pro tunc appeals. Do you know the -- are
13 those -- at what rate are those being
14 accepted as legitimate appeals?

15 MS. PAGAN: So if the taxpayer
16 simply documents why they're filing their
17 2014 appeal late, the Board will accept
18 that nunc pro tunc petition, and I'll
19 probably know by next spring if the
20 majority of those get granted or not.

21 COUNCILMAN OH: Okay. The
22 reason I ask is because typically as far
23 as I'm an attorney, nunc pro tuncs are
24 rarely approved, because they typically
25 involve some situation where a person,

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.

2 they were in a coma, something like that.

3 MS. PAGAN: Right.

4 COUNCILMAN OH: And the reason

5 I bring that up is because we get phone

6 calls from people who did not file on

7 time saying, I'm going to file nunc pro

8 tunc, I'm going to pay this amount of

9 money and should I do it, and basically,

10 you know -- so without really knowing if

11 there is a large amount of people that

12 are paying fees and going ahead and

13 that's going around and people are filing

14 all these nunc pro tuncs, which basically

15 are not based on any good reason, we'd

16 like people to know you can file it and

17 you can pay \$5,000 or whatever you're

18 paying, \$8,000 in some cases for these

19 nunc pro tunc appeals, but the chances of

20 them actually being granted simply

21 because you're late. And I deal with a

22 lot of people who don't speak English,

23 and they believe that even though they

24 filed late, without any good reason, that

25 by paying an attorney, that they have a

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 legal basis for getting a late filing
3 reviewed.

4 MS. PAGAN: So the Board
5 does -- when people come in and ask about
6 nunc pro tuncs, whether they call or
7 e-mail or come in the office, we do let
8 them know that no attorney is required,
9 number one, and there's no filing cost.
10 And even the Court of Common Pleas, if
11 you go down there to file a nunc pro
12 tunc, they will actually offer now, Hey,
13 save your \$180, \$200 and file free at the
14 BRT.

15 So there's no filing cost, and
16 we won't require an attorney. And, yes,
17 historically nunc pro tunc petitions
18 typically do get denied. We will find
19 out this spring the degree of the Board's
20 leniency this year, because, you know, it
21 was a challenging year for the entire
22 City. So without speaking for them, I'm
23 sure the Board will show some leniency in
24 granting those petitions.

25 COUNCILMAN OH: All right.

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.

2 Thank you very much.

3 I will note for the Chair that
4 I've come across cases where clients are
5 being charged \$5,000 to \$7,000 to file a
6 nunc pro tunc in court, and that's just a
7 shame.

8 Thank you.

9 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Yeah.

10 And oftentimes those people don't have
11 the resources to do that.

12 Before I recognize Councilman
13 Johnson, on that same note, I would think
14 possibly -- and I know you can't maybe
15 answer this definitively -- possibly one
16 of the reasons -- and I think other
17 Councilpeople brought this up. We
18 understand OPA, BRT, all that kind of
19 thing. To other people, it's alphabet
20 soup. There were people who thought,
21 even though we tried to get as much
22 knowledge out as possible, that when they
23 filed their initial review, they were
24 filing a BRT appeal. Do you think that
25 certainly one of the issues, because we

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.

2 hear it now, is, I didn't know I had to
3 file BRT, I filed for the initial review.

4 And I think they're being honest. I

5 don't think they're trying to get out of

6 it. So do you think that that could

7 possibly be one of the arguments that

8 will be listened to that maybe is

9 different from other years because of

10 this possible confusion that people could
11 have?

12 MS. PAGAN: Yes. Absolutely.

13 And we do ask people, Did you file that

14 first-level review? Because if you did,

15 we allow them to bypass that nunc pro

16 tunc process.

17 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Okay.

18 MS. PAGAN: And then just take

19 their late appeal as though timely filed.

20 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Okay.

21 Great. Great. Okay.

22 Again, before I recognize

23 Councilman Johnson, just for the record,

24 we're going to go right through to the

25 revenue tax bills just so we can keep

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.

2 moving rather than taking a break.

3 I'm sorry. Councilman Johnson.

4 COUNCILMAN JOHNSON: Thank you.

5 How you doing today? I just
6 want to get an idea of the -- it was
7 mentioned that the -- well, one, how many
8 appeals have been done thus far this year
9 and, two, because of the 1,000 percent
10 increase, give me an idea of what
11 practices that you will have adjusted to
12 addressing such an increase in value.

13 MS. PAGAN: Yes. So of the
14 23,000 appeals filed this year, 6,000
15 have been heard or decided, and I think
16 the piece you may have missed, since the
17 bill passed last month, our hearing
18 sessions have gone from three to five per
19 week to 14 a week. So in the past where
20 we were hearing approximately 150 cases a
21 week, it's closer to 600. So that's good
22 news. So we're hoping to have all
23 residential appeals heard or decided by
24 the end of September.

25 COUNCILMAN JOHNSON: End of

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 September?

3 MS. PAGAN: Yes.

4 COUNCILMAN JOHNSON: And just
5 one last thing. In following up on
6 Councilman Jones' comment regarding the
7 collaboration between the Board of
8 Revision of Taxes, OPA, and I will even
9 add on the Revenue Department, like do
10 y'all have weekly meetings where you're
11 all in one room? Because one affects the
12 other.

13 MS. PAGAN: Not weekly
14 meetings.

15 COUNCILMAN JOHNSON: Monthly,
16 biweekly?

17 MS. PAGAN: Depending what's
18 happening at the moment, I may be in
19 meetings with the OPA three days a week
20 and then may not see them again for a
21 month.

22 COUNCILMAN JOHNSON: So --

23 MS. PAGAN: It depends what the
24 issues are and --

25 COUNCILMAN JOHNSON: Let me

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 intervene just for a second. I just want
3 to bring up my good constituent from the
4 2nd Councilmanic District, Rebecca.

5 MS. RHYNHART: I'm sorry.

6 COUNCILMAN JOHNSON: Can you
7 come on up just for a second on behalf of
8 the Administration. I'm just trying to
9 get an understanding of why -- I know
10 there's a new Managing Director
11 restructuring under this new
12 Administration, and you know it works --
13 well, it works in a variety of different
14 capacities in terms of restructuring how
15 that particular component operates. So
16 I'm thinking on the financial side and
17 revenue collections, all things regarding
18 our taxes, how come there isn't a more
19 coordinated effort between Department of
20 Revenue, OPA, and the BRT?

21 MS. RHYNHART: Rebecca
22 Rhynhart, Budget Director.

23 There is coordination between
24 Revenue and OPA. They're both under the
25 Finance Director.

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.

2 COUNCILMAN JOHNSON: Yes.

3 That's correct.

4 MS. RHYNHART: So there is
5 definitely coordination. And my
6 understanding is the OPA and BRT do have
7 communications.

8 MS. PAGAN: Yes.

9 COUNCILMAN JOHNSON: They have
10 communications, but not weekly, biweekly.
11 Is it just based upon the issues that
12 come up? Like, for instance, the
13 question was asked when are we going to
14 do another assessment again. So
15 obviously the question here was we're not
16 going to do it in 2015, things are -- we
17 may see what happens in 2016, but I --
18 and I don't want to speak for Richie
19 McKeithen because he's not here, but I
20 think he will probably give me a
21 different overview of where he's at or
22 probably more detailed conversation of
23 where he's at in terms of doing the
24 actual annual assessments, because he
25 said something totally different when he

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 came here before regarding how we're
3 going to take a look at doing assessments
4 in the future.

5 So I'm just trying to figure
6 out how do we get all three departments
7 like really speaking with one voice on
8 this issue, or do you address it based
9 upon what the issue --

10 MS. RHYNHART: I mean, the BRT
11 is a separately elected office.

12 COUNCILMAN JOHNSON: Yes.

13 MS. RHYNHART: Rob.

14 COUNCILMAN JOHNSON: Come on,
15 Rob.

16 And I know it's separate, but
17 as a result of AVI -- and I'm probably
18 one of the people that can speak from
19 experience -- we've seen the impact
20 significantly throughout the 2nd
21 Councilmanic District, and the calls we
22 get are pretty much in some ways
23 interconnected.

24 MR. DUBOW: I think -- and
25 Carla can correct me if I'm wrong -- I

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 think there's constant communication
3 between OPA and Carla. I think they work
4 very closely together, Richie and Mike
5 Piper, I think pretty regularly.

6 MS. PAGAN: Yes.

7 MR. DUBOW: I don't know that
8 it's a scheduled weekly meeting, but I
9 think they're in contact all the time.
10 And I think there's constant interaction
11 between OPA and Revenue. I don't think
12 that that kind of communication exists or
13 really should exist, needs to exist
14 between BRT and Revenue.

15 COUNCILMAN JOHNSON: Okay.

16 MR. DUBOW: So I think that's
17 kind of how that plays out.

18 COUNCILMAN JOHNSON: So in
19 terms of the overall plan as we move
20 forward with reassessing individual homes
21 in the City of Philadelphia moving
22 forward, there will not be a concerted
23 effort of all three of those particular
24 organizations working together. OPA will
25 just take the lead and will BRT just

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 follow? And then I guess Revenue will
3 just chime in as need be?

4 MR. DUBOW: So in terms of
5 actually doing the assessments, so
6 that's -- I mean, that's obviously OPA's
7 function, but clearly impacted a lot by
8 BRT and kind of the amount of time
9 they're spending on the appeals process.
10 So those two things interact really
11 closely. I mean, the more time they're
12 spending on appeals, the less time they
13 can be spending on their assessment
14 functions.

15 COUNCILMAN JOHNSON: Yes.

16 MR. DUBOW: So this year
17 obviously was kind of unique in that not
18 only were all the properties reassessed,
19 but there were some significant changes
20 in values because there hadn't been this
21 type of reassessment in years, and you
22 know that better than anyone. So there
23 were more appeals than you'd see in a
24 typical year and probably more complex
25 issues. So it will take longer to get

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 through that process, which means that
3 OPA is spending more time on that, which
4 is why there's not a '15 assessment.

5 COUNCILMAN JOHNSON: I
6 understand now.

7 MR. DUBOW: So that's why those
8 two really need to work closely together.
9 I mean, the way it affects Revenue is on
10 the billing side. That's an OPA issue.
11 That's an OPA interface. When BRT
12 changes a value, that goes to OPA and
13 then OPA will send it to Revenue. So OPA
14 and Revenue need to work really closely.
15 OPA and BRT need to work really closely.

16 COUNCILMAN JOHNSON: I got you.
17 All right. Thank you.

18 Thank you.

19 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Thank
20 you, Councilman.

21 Councilman Goode.

22 COUNCILMAN GOODE: Thank you,
23 Mr. Chair.

24 I was waiting for Mr. Dubow to
25 volunteer to come to the table.

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.

2 MR. DUBOW: You can always call
3 me.

4 COUNCILMAN GOODE: Since you
5 volunteered to come to the table, I think
6 you know the question. What is the
7 Finance Department's analysis as it
8 relates to BRT appeals? Do you wait for
9 them to be over? Do you track them on an
10 annual basis? Do you track them
11 geographically in terms of how appeals
12 are going?

13 You heard the questions I asked
14 related to tax-abated properties and
15 those type of things where there could be
16 a revenue loss in terms of what was
17 projected. So how do you actually do
18 that and when do you let us know how the
19 appeals are going and how that number may
20 have changed?

21 MR. DUBOW: Right. So in the
22 budget, we have a projection on what we
23 think appeal losses will be. We assumed
24 a 50 percent increase in appeal losses,
25 about \$30 million in losses. So that's

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 what's in the budget. And then we're
3 tracking as the process goes through
4 what's actually happening with appeals
5 and looking at -- it's really early. So
6 it's really too early to tell, but we'll
7 be tracking on a regular basis what
8 appeal losses look like as a percent of
9 assessed value.

10 COUNCILMAN GOODE: I get all
11 that. When will you change your
12 projections, at what point and what point
13 will you let us know what's happening?

14 MR. DUBOW: So we've changed
15 already in some ways because looking at
16 the schedule -- the original projection
17 was that all the appeals will be done by
18 the end of this fiscal year. So that
19 clearly isn't going to happen. So our
20 projection now is based on the majority
21 of those appeals being resolved next
22 year. And since when you appeal this
23 year, you pay the old amount rather than
24 new amount. We essentially assumed that
25 anything that wasn't heard this year, we

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.

2 treated it like an appeal loss.

3 COUNCILMAN GOODE: So you

4 are --

5 MR. DUBOW: And that will come

6 back next year after the appeals or at

7 least a portion of it would.

8 COUNCILMAN GOODE: So is your

9 new number based upon those things that

10 are under appeal and the assumption that

11 they will pay the current tax bill?

12 MR. DUBOW: In '14 for the ones

13 that aren't heard. And then in '15, that

14 there would be -- after appeals are

15 heard, some of that revenue would come

16 back.

17 COUNCILMAN GOODE: So what's

18 that new number? It was 30 million. It

19 is now what?

20 MR. DUBOW: Do you know what it

21 is by year, '14 and '15?

22 Well, I'll get back to you.

23 We'll get you those exact numbers for

24 each year.

25 COUNCILMAN GOODE: Thank you.

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.

2 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

3 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Thank
4 you, Councilman.

5 Being no -- okay. I thought
6 somebody teed up there. Being no further
7 questions, thank you very much.

8 MS. PAGAN: Thank you.

9 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Thank you
10 very much. Our last -- Rob, you might as
11 well stay there.

12 MR. DUBOW: Oh, okay.

13 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Our next
14 area is revenue tax bills.

15 (Witnesses approached witness
16 table.)

17 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE:
18 Commissioner, hello again.

19 COMMISSIONER TOLSON: Good
20 morning again. My name is Clarena Tolson
21 and I'm pleased to be here as part of the
22 Committee of the Whole to address a
23 couple of Council bills, Bills No. 140148
24 and Bill No. 140147.

25 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Did you

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 have a prepared statement?

3 COMMISSIONER TOLSON: Yes.

4 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Please
5 proceed. I'm sorry.

6 COMMISSIONER TOLSON: I'm here
7 to testify in support of Bill No. 140148,
8 which extends the authorization to the
9 School District to impose a real estate
10 tax in Fiscal 2015.

11 This bill would continue the
12 combined City and Schools tax rate of
13 1.34 percent. Fifty-five percent of the
14 funds raised through the property tax go
15 to the School District. The City's Five
16 Year Plan anticipates that the rate will
17 remain in place over the life of the
18 Plan.

19 I am also here to testify in
20 support of Bill No. 140147, which extends
21 the authorization for the School District
22 to impose the U&O tax, or use and
23 occupancy tax, to Fiscal 2015.

24 The business use and occupancy
25 tax is a tax on the business, trade or

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 other commercial use and occupancy of
3 real estate located in Philadelphia. The
4 tax is collected, and the returns are
5 filed by the owner of the property.

6 The estimated current use and
7 occupancy tax revenue is projected to be
8 \$138.3 million in Fiscal '15, all of
9 which is allocated to the School District
10 of Philadelphia. In Fiscal 2015, the tax
11 rate will remain 1.77 percent. For the
12 tax year that began July 1st, 2013 and
13 thereafter, there is a 177,000 exemption
14 amount from the assessed value of each
15 property actually used for the purposes
16 of doing business. This translates into
17 a 2,000 annual tax exemption.

18 Both bills are essential for
19 generating the funds we need to support
20 our schools. We request a continuance of
21 these bills so that they can be heard on
22 May 5th so that they may be heard at the
23 same time as the other bills related to
24 the School District.

25 We thank you for the

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 opportunity to testify today.

3 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Thank
4 you, Commissioner.

5 Mr. Dubow, do you have anything
6 to add?

7 MR. DUBOW: I'm just here for
8 moral support, not that Clarena needs
9 that.

10 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Okay.
11 Commissioner, for the record, the amount
12 of money that's located in the proposed
13 tax rates, the real estate and the U&O,
14 how much money is located in those for
15 delinquent collections?

16 COMMISSIONER TOLSON:
17 Delinquent collections? One moment,
18 please, sir.

19 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Sure.

20 COMMISSIONER TOLSON: For
21 School District -- give me one moment.
22 I'll give you the number.

23 Our estimate for our current
24 delinquent or prior taxes due is \$62
25 million.

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.

2 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: And
3 that's an increase from last fiscal year?

4 COMMISSIONER TOLSON: That's
5 for Fiscal '14. An increase from the
6 prior year, yes.

7 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: All
8 right. Thank you.

9 Councilman Johnson.

10 COUNCILMAN JOHNSON: Thank you.
11 How you doing, Commissioner
12 Tolson?

13 COMMISSIONER TOLSON: Good
14 afternoon, sir -- or good morning, sir.

15 COUNCILMAN JOHNSON: Just a
16 couple questions regarding -- do you know
17 off the top the percentage of individuals
18 who enter into payment plans under our --
19 individuals who enter -- I'm sorry;
20 individuals who enter into payment plans
21 who foreclose on their homes through our
22 City's payment plans?

23 COMMISSIONER TOLSON: Payment
24 agreements?

25 COUNCILMAN JOHNSON: Payment

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 agreements, thank you, Commissioner.

3 COMMISSIONER TOLSON: Surely.

4 COUNCILMAN JOHNSON: I just
5 want to get an idea.

6 COMMISSIONER TOLSON: Surely.
7 For Calendar Year '13, we had
8 approximately 30,000 payment agreements.
9 Calendar Year '14 to date -- we're still
10 in the midst of that obviously; it's only
11 four months in -- we have approximately
12 21,500.

13 COUNCILMAN JOHNSON: Twenty-one
14 thousand?

15 COMMISSIONER TOLSON: Yes.

16 COUNCILMAN JOHNSON: And out of
17 the numbers for '13, do we have the
18 amount whose houses were actually
19 foreclosed on just based upon them not
20 adhering to their payment agreement?

21 COMMISSIONER TOLSON: No, I do
22 not. I can certainly look --

23 COUNCILMAN JOHNSON: If you can
24 provide that for me for '13. Obviously
25 we're in the middle of '14, but year to

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 date will still be sufficient for me.
3 It's just based upon some research we're
4 doing. And that's citywide, correct?

5 COMMISSIONER TOLSON: Yes.

6 COUNCILMAN JOHNSON: Is it
7 possible for you to break it down into
8 districts?

9 COMMISSIONER TOLSON: We will
10 do our very best.

11 COUNCILMAN JOHNSON: Are you
12 able to pull zip codes or the 2nd
13 Councilman District? If you can, that
14 will be very, very helpful for me.

15 COMMISSIONER TOLSON: We will
16 investigate both numbers.

17 COUNCILMAN JOHNSON: Thank you
18 very much, Commissioner.

19 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Thank
20 you, Councilman.

21 Councilman Goode.

22 COUNCILMAN GOODE: Thank you,
23 Mr. Chairman.

24 Mr. Dubow, these bills are
25 being continued -- I thought you were

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 still at the table.

3 MR. DUBOW: Sorry. We were
4 trying to figure out the answer to your
5 last question.

6 COUNCILMAN GOODE: These bills
7 will be continued to May 5th. You are
8 aware the tax abatement bill that's
9 scheduled for that day?

10 MR. DUBOW: I am.

11 COUNCILMAN GOODE: And you are
12 aware of the legal opinion associated
13 with that bill?

14 MR. DUBOW: I am not.

15 COUNCILMAN GOODE: There is a
16 Solicitor's opinion related to that bill.

17 MR. DUBOW: I have not seen
18 that.

19 COUNCILMAN GOODE: Okay.
20 Beyond that opinion, are you aware of the
21 flexibility the SRC may or may not have
22 with regard to the abatement bill if
23 enacted?

24 MR. DUBOW: What the abatement
25 bill says the SRC's role would be; is

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.

2 that what you mean?

3 COUNCILMAN GOODE: And what
4 flexibility they may have with regard to
5 the abatement program if that bill is
6 enacted.

7 MR. DUBOW: I think I am, yes.

8 COUNCILMAN GOODE: Will the Law
9 Department be prepared to respond to that
10 on May 5th beyond the legal opinion
11 that's already been issued?

12 MR. DUBOW: So are you asking
13 that we have someone from Law here to do
14 that?

15 COUNCILMAN GOODE: Yes.

16 MR. DUBOW: Okay.

17 COUNCILMAN GOODE: Thank you.

18 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

19 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Thank
20 you, Councilman.

21 Councilman Jones.

22 COUNCILMAN JONES: Thank you,
23 Mr. Chairman.

24 Actually two years ago we
25 submitted a report that showed the large

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 amount of delinquent real estate that was
3 owned by non-residential owners and also
4 looked at the percentage of delinquency
5 that they had in their respective
6 hometowns versus in the City of
7 Philadelphia.

8 Have you in your collection
9 efforts developed a strategy to go after
10 individuals who are absentee owners that
11 kind of take Philadelphia for granted?

12 COMMISSIONER TOLSON: Surely.
13 There was recent -- thank you,
14 Councilman. There was recent state
15 legislation that allows counties to lien
16 properties in counties outside of their
17 home base. We have been working with the
18 courts and prothonotaries around the
19 state to develop a process, and our
20 expectation is that within, I think, the
21 next two months, two and a half months,
22 we should have a system in place and be
23 pursuing liens, so that if you live in
24 Lower Merion and you own property in
25 Philadelphia that you don't pay taxes on,

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 that we can then lien your property in
3 Lower Merion.

4 COUNCILMAN JONES: Do you
5 recall the size of that particular
6 universe or receivable? I remember a
7 figure, but if you have it close to your
8 mind, I'd like to know what the potential
9 for that collectable would be.

10 COMMISSIONER TOLSON:
11 Councilman, I don't recall that number
12 right now, but I will get it for you.

13 COUNCILMAN JONES: My
14 recollection --

15 COMMISSIONER TOLSON: We have
16 it. I just don't recall it and I don't
17 want to misstate it.

18 COUNCILMAN JONES: It was
19 closing in on 400 million as a universe,
20 and that's that quality of folk that were
21 out there. If in fact 50 percent, 20
22 percent of that could come in, it would
23 solve a whole lot of revenue problems.
24 And I don't know what the amount was, but
25 it was staggering.

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.

2 So in two months, we hope to be
3 able to implement that. That should
4 create a spike in receivables, I would
5 imagine. I may not care too much about a
6 North Philadelphia property or a West
7 Philadelphia property that I waited to
8 speculate its way back into worth, but I
9 sure enough will care about my Lower
10 Merion home and the stigma that a Sheriff
11 Sale or lien might mean to that. So I
12 think that's a powerful tool on your tool
13 belt that will get us a spike in people
14 with suddenly good conscience and wanted
15 to pay their debts to Philadelphia.

16 COMMISSIONER TOLSON: You're
17 right, Councilman.

18 COUNCILMAN JONES: I look
19 forward to that.

20 COMMISSIONER TOLSON: We will
21 get that information.

22 COUNCILMAN JONES: Thank you,
23 Mr. Chairman.

24 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Thank
25 you, Councilman.

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.

2 Being no further questions,

3 thank you all very much for coming.

4 Thank you for all the work you do.

5 This Committee will stand in

6 recess until this evening, April 22nd at

7 6 o'clock, at which time we will

8 reconvene here in Room 400, City Hall for

9 public testimony on the proposed

10 Operating and Capital Budgets.

11 Thank you all very much.

12 (Recess.)

13 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Good

14 evening, everyone.

15 (Good evening.)

16 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Man,

17 that's pretty sad. You all sound like

18 you don't want to be here.

19 Good evening, everyone.

20 (Good evening.)

21 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:

22 That's what I'm talking about.

23 Welcome, and thank you all so

24 much for coming down this evening.

25 Now we'll get official. This

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 is a continuation of the public hearing
3 of the Committee of the Whole.

4 Let me give you the public
5 testimony ground rules. We are here this
6 evening to hear from you about the
7 proposed budget and where you believe the
8 City should focus its spending
9 priorities. To ensure that there is an
10 opportunity for all that is here this
11 evening to be heard, certain ground rules
12 have been established.

13 I hate using the term "ground
14 rules," just the whole rule thing, but
15 this is what the script says, so I don't
16 want you to think that I'm imposing rules
17 on you. I follow orders.

18 First, your testimony should be
19 about the budget and proposed spending
20 priorities. Copies of that are available
21 on the table at the back of the room.

22 All speakers must sign up in
23 order to testify. If you have not
24 already signed up, please do so now by
25 signing your name at the list at the same

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 table in the back of the room. Your name
3 will be called in the order in which you
4 have signed up. You will have three
5 minutes to speak, in order to be fair,
6 because we have such a significant number
7 of people who are interested in
8 testifying tonight. We want to make sure
9 everybody gets an opportunity.

10 We have a timer, and when you
11 hear the old-fashioned egg timer, when
12 your three minutes are up, that timer
13 will go off, and if you feel like you
14 want to stop before the three minutes are
15 up, it's okay.

16 I would ask Ms. Lewis to please
17 read the name of our first speaker.

18 MS. LEWIS: Our first speaker
19 is Jeannine Lisitski.

20 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: You
21 know what, why don't we just bring three
22 up at a time.

23 MS. LEWIS: Jeannine Lisitski,
24 Kathleen Hall, and Tan Vu.

25 (Witnesses approached witness

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 table.)

3 MS. LISITSKI: Good evening.

4 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Good
5 evening.

6 MS. LISITSKI: My name is
7 Jeannine Lisitski and I'm the Executive
8 Director of Women Against Abuse, and we
9 appreciate the ongoing support of City
10 Council.

11 Women Against Abuse is the
12 largest domestic violence service
13 provider and advocacy organization here
14 in Pennsylvania. We serve about 15,000
15 people each year, and we're funded
16 through a number of line items, both
17 government and private. Philadelphia's
18 Office of Supportive Housing and
19 Department of Human Services are integral
20 in supporting the services of Women
21 Against Abuse.

22 Last year, our Safe Haven, the
23 only one in Philadelphia for survivors of
24 domestic violence, turned away an
25 all-time high of nearly 9,000 requests

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 for safe shelter. As you know, City
3 Council prioritized funding for a new
4 100-bed Safe Haven, and we are really
5 happy to announce that we're making
6 steady progress on renovations on our new
7 building and will open this spring. The
8 new Safe Haven will double Philadelphia's
9 capacity to shelter survivors.

10 Additionally, thanks to the
11 strategic thinking of the Office of
12 Supportive Housing, we've established a
13 domestic violence specialist within OSH's
14 Central Family Intake. The DV specialist
15 is able to meet with clients to triage
16 their housing and safety needs and
17 directly connect them to intake in our
18 Safe Haven, as well as the emergency bed
19 placements that are available through our
20 domestic violence sister agencies. The
21 installation of this staff person has
22 created a more seamless and safer
23 emergency housing response for survivors.

24 Although we are extremely
25 grateful for the additional funding made

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 available, the 2.5 million that was
3 allotted to the Safe Haven leaves a
4 financial gap as well as a gap in client
5 services. Specifically, there's not
6 enough funding to provide parallel
7 on-site children's and behavioral health
8 services that we are able to provide at
9 our current Safe Haven.

10 Almost done.

11 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Go
12 ahead.

13 MS. LISITSKI: Both of these
14 services are critical interventions for
15 persons experiencing DV as they move
16 forward from trauma, and filling this gap
17 is fundamental to effectively addressing
18 complex trauma.

19 So we ask that you continue to
20 remember victims of domestic violence in
21 the budget and particularly those who
22 need emergency housing and life-saving
23 legal protections. Together, we know
24 that we can break the cycle of abuse and
25 create safety for families and for our

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 community.

3 So thank you very much.

4 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:

5 Thank you so much, and thank you very
6 much for your good work.

7 Hold on one second, please.

8 Councilwoman Tasco. The Chair
9 recognizes Councilwoman Tasco.

10 COUNCILWOMAN TASCO: Good
11 evening and thank you so much for coming
12 out. Thank you for the wonderful work
13 you're doing.

14 Are there any funds from the
15 state that are available to you for
16 increasing locations for families?

17 MS. LISITSKI: There's
18 little -- state funding has been flat for
19 so long and only last year there was a
20 very slight increase that helped to
21 offset the federal sequestration cut. So
22 right now the state does support our
23 current Safe Haven, which they support a
24 large chunk and the City does too, but
25 there's no additional funds.

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.

2 COUNCILWOMAN TASCO: Thank you.

3 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:

4 Thank you, Councilwoman.

5 MS. LISITSKI: Thank you.

6 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:

7 Thank you so much for your testimony.

8 Hold on. I'm sorry. One more
9 question. Sorry.

10 The Chair recognizes
11 Councilwoman Brown.

12 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: Thank you.

13 Good evening.

14 MS. LISITSKI: Good evening.

15 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN:

16 Councilwoman Tasco raised a question
17 about state contribution. Speak briefly
18 and more about the work you're doing on
19 behalf of children in that circumstance.

20 MS. LISITSKI: So within -- we
21 have children's case management. So
22 every family that comes to us, we have a
23 case manager specifically for the
24 children. So they literally make sure
25 that their school is seamless. You know,

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 if they have to transfer to schools, they
3 go and help create a safety plan, because
4 those kids are also in danger. They make
5 sure that the children are getting
6 trauma-informed behavioral healthcare,
7 whether it be with us or within the
8 community, and that their needs are
9 addressed.

10 We have many children who come
11 to us and are not speaking because of the
12 trauma that they've seen, and by working
13 with them, by having behavioral
14 healthcare on site, we're able to turn
15 that around quickly. We're seeing that
16 children are very resilient, but only if
17 they can get these critical services.
18 And so in our current shelter, we have
19 them, but in the new Safe Haven, we
20 won't, because we have 2.5 million
21 allotted and that's not enough.

22 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: What about
23 after-school programming for the
24 children?

25 MS. LISITSKI: And that's part

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 of what we do as well. We have
3 after-school programming at our current
4 Safe Haven. We will not have that at the
5 new Safe Haven because of the gap.

6 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: Okay. All
7 right. That's what I needed to know.
8 And so with that, then, any connectedness
9 or support from the Philadelphia
10 Foundation?

11 MS. LISITSKI: Yes, a lot of
12 support.

13 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: Okay.

14 MS. LISITSKI: They've been a
15 champion of this work.

16 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: Okay,
17 then. Thank you.

18 Thank you, Mr. President.

19 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:

20 Thank you, Councilwoman.

21 Thank you.

22 Please proceed.

23 MS. HALL: Hi. My name is
24 Kathleen Hall. I'm a medical case
25 manager at a federally qualified health

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 center within West Philadelphia area, and
3 I come speaking on behalf of a new
4 program that we're trying to get started
5 called New Beginnings. New Beginnings
6 would be a non-profit organization, and
7 we're looking to target teen pregnancy
8 prevention.

9 I've been in the non-profit
10 field for over 25 years, and what I
11 experience and see in teenagers and
12 pregnancy, as young as 12 years old are
13 pregnant and up to the age of 19, and I
14 see what teen pregnancy can do to
15 teenagers with lack of income for
16 families, lack of housing, lack of
17 support system, and this program would
18 target prevention of pregnancy by
19 educating teenagers on pregnancy
20 prevention, counseling, healthcare. We
21 could link them into health services as
22 well as education to encourage them to
23 continue their education as well as
24 preventing pregnancy.

25 The purpose of this would be to

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 hope that the City Council will look at a
3 community after-school educational
4 program within the West Philadelphia
5 area, and this would focus on educating
6 teenagers in group and individual
7 settings on prevention of not only
8 pregnancy, but prevention of STD and HIV.
9 Also, we would hope that -- there are
10 really no current programs within the
11 West Philadelphia area that would service
12 such a community of teenagers to help
13 educate them on reasons why to delay
14 sexual behaviors and to use birth control
15 if they are sexually active.

16 The benefits of this program,
17 not only would it be to prevent STD and
18 HIV, also the benefit would be to partner
19 with the Family Planning Council in their
20 program called I Matter. And I Matter is
21 a program that also speaks to teen
22 pregnancy prevention. This program would
23 also help to refer teenagers into
24 healthcare as well as give them other
25 options, because we feel as though the

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 more options they have, the better
3 choices that they would make.

4 There are several buildings
5 throughout West Philadelphia that I have
6 noticed, such as the building at 60th and
7 Haverford, that are vacant. There's
8 another one at 55th and Media that is
9 also vacant, and these buildings will
10 also be a good place to have an
11 educational center for teenagers after
12 school or even before school. It would
13 be like a place where teenagers could
14 come and get information on prevention.

15 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:

16 Thank you. Man, I hate the way it
17 abruptly cut you off. Were you done?

18 MS. HALL: Yes.

19 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:

20 Okay. It just sounded like it cut you
21 mid sentence. Okay. Thank you. Thank
22 you so much for your testimony.

23 MS. LEWIS: The next three
24 speakers, Tan Vu, Farah Jimenez, and
25 Julie Hawkins.

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.

2 (No response.)

3 MS. LEWIS: Tan Vu, Farah
4 Jimenez, and Julie Hawkins.

5 MS. HAWKINS: There's a whole
6 group of us. That's why we're together
7 as a panel.

8 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: My
9 understanding is there's four
10 individuals --

11 MS. HAWKINS: There's four of
12 us. Do you want us all to come up now?

13 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Did
14 we call any of the names?

15 MS. HAWKINS: Just mine.

16 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Oh,
17 okay. So you want to come up together?

18 MS. HAWKINS: Yes.

19 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:
20 Fine. Sure.

21 MS. LEWIS: Julie Hawkins,
22 Michael Norris, and Christina Rose.

23 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:
24 Let's just do the four.

25 (Witnesses approached witness

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 table.)

3 MS. HAWKINS: We have copies of
4 our testimony.

5 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: And
6 if you have any information in support of
7 your testimony, you can just submit it
8 for the record and we will include it in
9 the docket.

10 Good evening.

11 MR. NORRIS: Good evening,
12 Council President Clarke and members of
13 City Council. Thank you for the
14 opportunity to speak with you this
15 evening about the --

16 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:
17 Could you all just for the record give
18 your name at the start of your testimony
19 when you testify just for the
20 stenographer.

21 MR. NORRIS: Sure. I'm Michael
22 Norris. I'm the Interim Executive
23 Director of the Greater Philadelphia
24 Cultural Alliance.

25 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.

2 Thank you.

3 MR. NORRIS: Thank you for this
4 opportunity to speak with you about the
5 cultural sector's impact on our city and
6 the need to restore funding for the
7 Philadelphia Cultural Fund to its
8 previous level of \$3.2 million.

9 I'm the Interim Executive
10 Director of the Greater Philadelphia
11 Cultural Alliance. The Cultural Alliance
12 represents over 400 of the region's
13 cultural organizations, and nearly
14 three-quarters of those organizations are
15 here in Philadelphia. We are also proud
16 to be one of the 273 Philadelphia
17 Cultural Fund grantees.

18 Today, you will hear from Julie
19 Hawkins, Board President of the
20 Philadelphia Cultural Fund; Steven
21 Wittenberg, Board President of Spells
22 Writing Lab, another Cultural Fund
23 grantee; and Asia Kaiser, a Philadelphia
24 teen who participates in arts programs
25 around the City.

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.

2 Today, we are celebrating
3 Philadelphia Arts Advocacy Day. Arts
4 supporters from across the City have
5 signed our petition, taken to social
6 media, and joined us here today, all to
7 show their support for the Cultural Fund.
8 The people who participated in this
9 campaign hail from every district in the
10 City and represent different backgrounds,
11 ages, and socioeconomic statuses. The
12 diversity of these advocates reflects the
13 vast impact that our cultural
14 organizations have on the people of
15 Philadelphia.

16 Philadelphia is home to a
17 vibrant and celebrated cultural sector.
18 The mile from City Hall to the
19 Philadelphia Museum of Art is often
20 lauded as the most artistic mile in the
21 country, but it isn't just the famed
22 "Museum Mile" that makes Philadelphia a
23 world-class cultural destination. We
24 have art galleries in Old City, jazz
25 festivals in West Oak Lane, and public

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 gardens in Strawberry Mansion. We are
3 also home to organizations like Spells
4 Writing Lab that are stepping up and
5 providing creative outlets for students
6 with no access to arts education.

7 All these programs and
8 organizations have a major impact on the
9 Philadelphia economy. The Philadelphia
10 cultural sector has a total economic
11 impact of \$2.8 billion and generates
12 30,000 jobs, \$766 million in household
13 income for Philadelphia residents, and
14 \$119 million in tax revenue for the City.

15 But all the vibrancy generated
16 by our cultural assets is threatened by
17 financial vulnerability. Almost half of
18 the organizations we monitor are in the
19 red. Our belief is that if our community
20 wants the cultural sector to continue
21 delivering these economic and social
22 benefits, we need to invest in it.
23 That's why we support public policies
24 that provide cultural organizations with
25 the resources they need and why we

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 encourage City Council to restore the
3 Cultural Fund to \$3.2 million.

4 In closing, I would like to
5 read a statement from Pulitzer
6 Prize-winning playwright Quiara Alegria
7 Hudes, who is a Philadelphia native and
8 the niece of Councilwoman
9 Quinones-Sanchez. As a teenager, Quiara
10 joined Philadelphia Young Playwrights,
11 another Cultural Fund grantee, where she
12 wrote and produced her first play.
13 Quiara writes that, quote, "When I put
14 pen to paper and wrote my play, I decided
15 to articulate the City of Philadelphia as
16 I had experienced it growing up in West
17 Philly. Articulating my world view,
18 giving voice to a new side of things
19 changed my relationship with my world. I
20 suddenly was an active shaper of my
21 community, an intellectual, an
22 entertainer, a truth teller. Young
23 Playwrights prepared me for a life in
24 literature, a life of civic action, a
25 life of activism, and a true democratic

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 engagement with my community."

3 One sentence.

4 On behalf of the supporters in
5 this room and across the City, I ask you
6 to restore the Cultural Fund's budget so
7 that all the residents of our city,
8 especially young people like Quiara and
9 Asia, can benefit from Philadelphia's
10 rich and diverse cultural assets.

11 Thank you.

12 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:

13 Thank you.

14 (Applause.)

15 MS. HAWKINS: Hi. I'm Julie
16 Hawkins, Board President of the
17 Philadelphia Cultural Fund. Thanks again
18 for the opportunity to be here today.

19 For the last month or so,
20 you've seen a lot of tweets and posts
21 about what Philly Arts Do. You saw it
22 happening live in the hallways just a few
23 hours ago. You've also seen a lot of
24 requests today to restore arts funding in
25 Philadelphia. So I'm here tonight to

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 tell you more about what Philly Arts Do
3 so that we can work together to restore
4 that arts funding.

5 What Philly Arts Do for people
6 and communities is documented in multiple
7 research studies. The arts in
8 Philadelphia promote individual growth,
9 educational gains, economic development,
10 community dialogue, and social cohesion.
11 They animate spaces, celebrate our
12 diverse heritage, provide pathways to
13 opportunity, and support healing.

14 What Philly Arts Do is provide
15 a great return on investment. One
16 example is an after-school program like
17 Rock to the Future that provide safe and
18 empowering environments for Philadelphia
19 youth. At Rock to the Future, students
20 receive individual music lessons, learn
21 to read sheet music, compose their own
22 songs, play a range of instruments, and
23 form their own rock bands. Rock to the
24 Future does what Philly Arts Do so well.
25 It engages the whole person by tapping

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 into and then building on what matters to
3 them.

4 What Philly Arts Do is step up
5 to the plate. Despite cuts in funding,
6 organizations and artists maintain their
7 support of classrooms, curriculum,
8 teachers, and students in the
9 Philadelphia School District. Groups
10 like Musicopia, who had two wonderful
11 musicians playing in the hallway earlier
12 today, provide not just music
13 instruction, but musical instruments to
14 schools across the District and the
15 region. Last year alone, Musicopia
16 served more than 34,000 students.

17 What Philly Arts Do is
18 wonderful. It's vital, but it needs your
19 increased support in the City budget.
20 When the recession hit, the Philadelphia
21 Cultural Fund was cut by 42 percent, from
22 \$3.2 million to \$1.84 million. It's been
23 flat-lining ever since. Among the
24 country's five most populated cities,
25 Philadelphia has by far the lowest

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 per-capita local government investment in
3 arts and culture. This is also true of
4 cities whose populations are comparable
5 to Philadelphia's and smaller cities
6 whose cultural sectors, dare I say, are
7 maybe not as vibrant and diverse as ours.
8 We need you to restore arts funding in
9 Philadelphia.

10 What Philly Arts Do is forge
11 ahead despite the obstacles. Even with
12 sustained cuts in funding, the Cultural
13 Fund has increased its access to
14 Philadelphia's artists and cultural
15 organizations. We've redesigned our
16 grant process to be more inclusive and
17 more supportive of the diversity and
18 range of our city's cultural assets and
19 its people. These changes are working,
20 and they need your support.

21 What Philly Arts Do deserves
22 more investment from Philadelphia. An
23 increase in the Cultural Fund will enable
24 us to bring back youth arts enrichment
25 grants. They make investments in arts

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 education that serve K through 12
3 students in the School District.

4 Thank you for the chance to
5 speak today, for the work that you do on
6 behalf of all Philadelphians, and for
7 considering the City's investment in what
8 Philly Arts Do. Restore our funding.

9 (Applause.)

10 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:

11 Thank you.

12 MR. WITTENBERG: Good evening.
13 My name is Steve Wittenberg, the
14 President of Spells Writing Lab, a small
15 but growing non-profit located in Council
16 President Clarke's 5th District in North
17 Philadelphia on the campus of the Village
18 of Arts and Humanities. Our mission is
19 to instill the love of creative writing
20 in Philadelphia's school-age children
21 through fun and imaginative writing
22 programs, which includes an after-school
23 writing club, workshops, and a six-week
24 summer writing camp, all free programs.

25 Over our four-year history, we

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 estimate that we've engaged over 4,000
3 students in schools and in over 70
4 community programs such as the
5 Philadelphia Science Festival and Mayor
6 Nutter's PhillyGoes2College program.
7 Eighty to 90 percent of our students are
8 considered underprivileged. We've
9 achieved success on a meager \$40,000 per
10 year budget. All other accomplishments
11 come by way of pro bono services, local
12 college interns, and volunteerism.

13 Over the next few years, we aim
14 to make a significant impact on
15 Philadelphia's youth. With increased
16 funding, we will be able to renovate a
17 blighted building, which will double our
18 capacity. We can help local schools
19 create after-school writing programs. We
20 can expand other areas of the City. This
21 month we met with Drexel University to
22 begin discussions on a collaboration to
23 bring Spells to West Philadelphia as part
24 of the President's Promise Zone program.
25 Our success depends on an influx of grant

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 money from endowments like the
3 Philadelphia Cultural Fund. Last month
4 we received a modest, but meaningful,
5 grant from the Fund, which unfortunately
6 decreased almost 50 percent from prior
7 years. The current grant will help us,
8 but is not nearly enough.

9 We've heard our challenges
10 echoed by other organizations with whom
11 we collaborate. As the Director of
12 Legacy and Philanthropy Solutions at SEI,
13 I'm exposed to the same budget issues of
14 many meaningful organizations throughout
15 the region. We understand the
16 constraints of the City's budget, but ask
17 that you strongly consider increasing the
18 Philadelphia Cultural Fund's allotment in
19 future years.

20 Writing is a key to succuss,
21 both in school and future endeavors. In
22 this struggling educational climate,
23 Spells is an outlet to improve children's
24 writing. I invite you to our lab, our
25 writing lab, where you'll see the impact

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 small organizations can make. You'll see
3 students like Vanessa and Amir
4 experimenting with words in a safe and
5 welcoming space, reaching for books and
6 computers to expand the world through
7 stories and ideas, and you'll see those
8 same students create their own works and
9 take that skill and love of writing home
10 with them. The proof of our success is
11 our impact on the students.

12 In closing, I leave you with
13 the musings of Trinity, age 12, who wrote
14 the following in a Martin Luther King,
15 Jr. workshop called "I have a dream."

16 I have a dream. I have a dream
17 that there will be no more writer's
18 block, because right now I have writer's
19 block.

20 I have a dream that one day
21 I'll know what to say and what I'm
22 talking about.

23 I have a dream that one day I
24 won't have writer's block, because I've
25 always had lots of things on my mind, but

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.

2 never quite had time to sort them out.

3 I have a dream. I have a dream
4 that my mind will one day sort out all my
5 thoughts and make me a better writer.

6 I have a dream that one day I'd
7 eat octopus with my best friend Machiah
8 because we want to eat some.

9 I have a dream that one day I'd
10 stop rambling about random things because
11 then people will listen. I want to be
12 the voice of the voiceless. This is my
13 hope. This will be the day when I move
14 on to 7th grade, and when this happens,
15 I'll be best writer in my school and take
16 on writing assignments anyone gives me.
17 I have a dream.

18 We at Spells have a dream too.
19 Without the assistance of organizations
20 like the Philadelphia Cultural Fund, we
21 will not be able to fulfill the dreams of
22 Trinity and students like her who strive
23 to embrace and explore new forms of
24 self-expression.

25 Thank you.

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.

2 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:

3 Thank you.

4 (Applause.)

5 MS. KAISER: Hello.

6 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:

7 Hello.

8 MS. KAISER: My name is Asia

9 Kaiser and I'm a sophomore at J.R.

10 Masterman. I'm also on the Teen Council

11 for STAMP, the Greater Philadelphia

12 Cultural Alliance program which gives

13 Philadelphia teens free access to museums

14 across the City.

15 I love having access to so many

16 cultural opportunities in the City with

17 my STAMP pass. When I was younger, my

18 mom would take me to museums all the

19 time, and I've loved having the

20 opportunity to branch out on my own and

21 explore my own interests.

22 I was born and raised in

23 Philadelphia and I love the City because

24 of its beautiful arts, great cultural

25 diversity, and historic importance. I

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.

2 believe that Philadelphia's rich talent
3 in the arts is part of what makes it the
4 unique city it is.

5 I am so grateful that there are
6 so many ways for me to see art and
7 experience culture in Philadelphia and
8 also that there are so many organizations
9 that give me opportunities to participate
10 in the arts.

11 One organization I'm especially
12 close to is Musicopia, a Philadelphia
13 Cultural Fund grantee organization. I
14 play the cello in their orchestra, and
15 I'm very passionate about what I do. I
16 love music and the experience of playing
17 in an orchestra with fellow musicians. I
18 believe that playing an instrument is a
19 beautiful form of self-expression and
20 freedom and an opportunity that every
21 student in Philadelphia should be able to
22 experience.

23 I was principal cellist in
24 Philadelphia Middle School All-City and I
25 have been a member of the High School

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 All-City Orchestra for two years, and I'm
3 very proud of my accomplishments, which
4 have been made possible by these type of
5 organizations across the City.

6 I think one way to make
7 Philadelphia an even more amazing city is
8 by giving opportunities for all children
9 to explore the arts, whether it's in
10 school, on their own or through one of
11 the many amazing cultural institutions in
12 Philadelphia, like the Philadelphia
13 Cultural Fund grantee organizations.

14 Thank you.

15 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:

16 Thank you.

17 (Applause.)

18 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: I
19 pity who has to follow you in this
20 testimony. Thank you so much.

21 MR. NORRIS: Thank you.

22 MS. LEWIS: The next three
23 witnesses, Beth McConnell, Judith
24 Robinson, and Linda Richardson.

25 Beth McConnell, Judith

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.

2 Robinson, and Linda Richardson.

3 (Witnesses approached witness
4 table.)

5 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Good
6 evening.

7 MS. McCONNELL: I have some
8 longer written testimony. I'll
9 summarize.

10 Good evening. Thank you for
11 the opportunity to testify. My name is
12 Beth McConnell, Policy Director at the
13 Philadelphia Association of CDCs.

14 As you all know, Congress has
15 slashed funding that Philadelphia
16 receives for affordable housing and
17 community development by more than 40
18 million since 2002, and another cut of
19 740,000 is projected for our CDBG
20 allocation next year. These cuts have
21 devastating impacts on Philadelphia's
22 low-income residents and distressed
23 neighborhoods. In fact, we only have
24 about 38 units of affordable housing for
25 every 100 households that are extremely

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 low income. The waiting list for housing
3 repair programs are years long, and too
4 many of our neighborhood commercial
5 corridors are plagued with vacancies,
6 poor property conditions, and litter.

7 We want to applaud Council and
8 the Administration for your leadership in
9 creating and expanding both the CDC Tax
10 Credit Program and the Philadelphia
11 Housing Trust Fund, but the City's annual
12 General Fund outlay is inadequate to meet
13 the enormous needs. Just a little over 3
14 million is proposed for next year, and
15 that's down from 5 and a half million in
16 FY07.

17 So we want to urge that you
18 work with the Administration to pass
19 legislation to increase funding for the
20 Housing Trust Fund this spring by
21 increasing the mortgage and deed
22 recording fee by \$5. That could provide
23 up to 750,000 per year to help restore
24 some of the cuts to affordable housing
25 development and preservation.

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.

2 We also urge Council to work
3 with the Administration to provide a
4 million in new General Fund dollars for
5 two key commercial corridor programs,
6 which would allow the Commerce Department
7 to expand the programs to as many as 12
8 corridors. Our neighborhood commercial
9 corridors are the economic veins of our
10 city, and research shows that when
11 they're in good condition, they increase
12 home values by 36 percent, but the
13 opposite is true when they're in bad
14 condition. But of the more than 60
15 corridors throughout our city, fewer than
16 18 actually receive support from the
17 Targeted Corridor Management Program and
18 the Corridor Cleaning grants, all of
19 which are funded by CDBG funds. And some
20 distressed corridors, particularly in the
21 Northwest, are not eligible to receive
22 funding from these programs because of
23 federal program restrictions. So
24 providing some General Fund dollars would
25 give Commerce the flexibility to direct

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 resources to corridors that are not CDBG
3 eligible, but really still in need of
4 management and cleaning.

5 We also urge Council to support
6 Mayor Nutter's request for \$500,000 from
7 the General Fund as part of a larger
8 funding strategy for the Land Bank. Once
9 fully implemented, the Land Bank will, of
10 course, transform the way we get vacant
11 properties back into productive reuse,
12 generating property tax revenue that our
13 schools and cities need.

14 In closing, more than 42
15 percent, or more than \$20 million, of
16 Philadelphia's CDBG allocation will be
17 spent on operational costs for the City
18 in FY15, and those are dollars that are
19 not then available to community
20 organizations on the ground that provide
21 critical services, support, and economic
22 development activity in our
23 neighborhoods. The work that City staff
24 does with those funds is very important,
25 but it's time for the General Fund to

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 replace some of those dollars. At a time
3 when some parts of the City are seeing
4 new private investment and growth, it's
5 really our responsibility to invest
6 public dollars in equitable development
7 strategies to benefit neighborhoods and
8 residents that would otherwise be left
9 behind.

10 Thank you very much for
11 allowing us to provide testimony.

12 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:
13 Thank you so much for your testimony.

14 Hold on.

15 The Chair recognizes Councilman
16 Jones.

17 COUNCILMAN JONES: Thank you,
18 Mr. President.

19 I just want to thank you for
20 your testimony. We just engaged in a
21 dialogue with the Office of Housing and
22 Community Development, the Redevelopment
23 Authority, and they're talking about the
24 continued cut from CDBG dollars, and I
25 wanted to task them to look in

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 non-conventional ways to figure it out
3 how to get affordable housing, how to get
4 affordable rental, and one of the
5 proposals Council President Clarke did is
6 to look outside the box to figure out how
7 we can create a total of about 3,000
8 units within affordable housing.

9 So I don't know if you had an
10 opportunity to check that out, but we
11 would love to collaborate with you on
12 figuring it out. So I just wanted to put
13 that out there and make that offer.

14 MS. McCONNELL: Absolutely.
15 Thank you, Councilman.

16 COUNCILMAN JONES: Thank you,
17 Mr. President.

18 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:
19 Thank you, Councilman.

20 Thank you so much for your
21 testimony.

22 Good evening.

23 MS. RICHARDSON: Good evening.
24 My name is Linda Waters Richardson and I
25 serve as the President of the Uptown

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 Entertainment and Development
3 Corporation. My organization is the
4 owner of the historic Uptown Theatre.
5 Our mission is to provide neighborhood
6 stabilization through programs such as
7 planning -- we are a Registered Community
8 Organization -- our youth programs, art
9 and culture, and economic development.

10 We are currently convening many
11 art and cultural groups that provide
12 services to the broader community, but
13 whose mission is to promote and
14 perpetuate African American culture. If
15 fully operational, our combined operating
16 budgets would have an impact of 189 jobs
17 and our construction capital budget would
18 represent 225 jobs. Our organizations
19 are in neighborhoods that are low income
20 and many are doing historic preservation
21 while providing vital services to
22 underserved residents. While our
23 missions are culture in nature, we do not
24 have a one-and-done approach to tourism.
25 Many of us visiting historic sites visit

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 in elementary school, or when we have
3 children, take them, or when we are
4 lucky, like myself, have grandchildren,
5 take them.

6 Our organizations and sites
7 provide ongoing services to ensure
8 community enhancement, and many of us are
9 models of the National Historic Trust
10 emerging sites that are looking at a
11 broad range of approach to historic
12 preservation. The first African American
13 historic preservation trail that we have
14 convened promotes health and wellness
15 through biking, walking, and adding
16 cultural enrichment, which was launched
17 in February of 2013. The pilot project
18 was supported by the Delaware Valley
19 Regional Planning Commission.

20 There are over 400 African
21 American historic sites documented.
22 However, many of those sites no longer
23 exist, and those that do are in need of
24 capital and operating support. Many of
25 those sites in our network promote 19th

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 and 20th century icons such as the Paul
3 Robeson House in West Philadelphia, the
4 John Coltrane House in North
5 Philadelphia, Tindley Temple in South
6 Philadelphia and, of course, the Uptown
7 Theatre.

8 I can talk a little bit about
9 the trail. So I'm going to truncate my
10 presentation, but the trail is organized
11 in historic areas that promote the
12 Philadelphia 7th Ward, the Echoes of the
13 Great Migration, Music as an Expression
14 of Culture, Religious Institutions as
15 Community Builders, and the Underground
16 Railroad to Civil Rights, Pathways to
17 Freedom.

18 I'm just going to say we want
19 to support and we are asking for support
20 for funding of culture as well as
21 expanding the General Fund for support of
22 the neighborhood cultural corridors, the
23 Cultural Cleaning grants, and I have a
24 list of those groups that I represent and
25 in my testimony.

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.

2 So I want to thank you for your
3 support.

4 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:

5 Thank you so much.

6 MS. LEWIS: The next three
7 witnesses, Frank Monaghan, Charles
8 Lanier, and Amy Dougherty.

9 (Witnesses approached witness
10 table.)

11 MR. MONAGHAN: Should I start?

12 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Good
13 evening.

14 MR. MONAGHAN: Hi. Good
15 evening. Thank you for the opportunity.
16 I'm Frank Monaghan, Executive Director,
17 Habitat for Humanity Philadelphia. We
18 work to transform lives. We build and
19 repair homes in Philadelphia for people
20 who are in between 30 and 60 percent of
21 the median income. The families buy the
22 house from us at a zero interest mortgage
23 after they do 350 hours of sweat equity.
24 Tomorrow we will be dedicating our 174th
25 house, actually in Council President

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 Clarke's district, and we're very proud
3 of that.

4 We also restore and preserve
5 existing homes for low-income homeowners
6 by providing repairs, needed
7 modifications, and weatherization. We're
8 able to do this through two robust
9 Habitat repair programs that work in many
10 neighborhoods throughout the City.
11 Habitat is able to assist 75 to 100
12 homeowners and their families each year
13 through these preservation programs. We
14 found that if the roof goes in four
15 years, the home becomes vacant. So we
16 try to catch it early on.

17 Habitat is strategically
18 building and preserving communities
19 throughout the City. We leverage every
20 dollar we spend to provide \$4.50 worth of
21 critical services, yet we are bound by
22 our limited financial resources. Federal
23 and state funding for community
24 development and affordable housing has
25 been drastically cut over the last few

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 years. At Habitat, we very much
3 appreciate that the City and specifically
4 OHCD is facing nearly \$40 million in
5 budget cuts from the federal government.
6 We understand that this is for City
7 agencies to make some extremely difficult
8 decisions about how to prioritize the use
9 of CDBG and other funds.

10 While funding has decreased,
11 the need has not. The National Low
12 Income Housing Coalition estimates that
13 Philadelphia has only 38 affordable units
14 for every 100 households. We need
15 approximately 60,000 more units to meet
16 the need of residents who live at or
17 below 30 percent of AMI.

18 We understand these cuts hurt
19 all agencies that are working to
20 preserve, restore, and build safe and
21 affordable homes for hundreds of
22 thousands of low-income residents in
23 Philadelphia. However, locally generated
24 funds have also been inadequate in
25 comparison to the extreme needs. The

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 City's General Fund contribution to
3 affordable homes and community economic
4 development is minimal at just \$3 million
5 per year. Of this, \$2.3 million from the
6 City's General Fund allocated for vacant
7 land management is essential, but we also
8 need more funding that goes to preserve
9 affordable homes and Philadelphia
10 traditional housing stock.

11 Specifically, we urge the
12 Nutter Administration to work with City
13 Council to introduce and pass legislation
14 to increase funding to the Housing Trust
15 Fund by raising the mortgage deed and
16 recording fees by \$5, which could raise
17 an additional \$750,000 per year.

18 We also ensure adequate funding
19 for the Land Bank so that organizations
20 like Habitat are able to acquire and
21 aggregate vacant land to seize and
22 capitalize on all opportunities for more
23 affordable housing. Mayor Nutter has
24 proposed using 500,000 General Fund
25 dollars towards the Land Bank's total

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 budget. It is critical to ensure that
3 whatever local sources of revenue are
4 identified, that funding is adequate to
5 ensure the Land Bank works.

6 Consider utilizing some larger
7 proportion of CDBG funding for housing
8 preservation for low-income homeowners.
9 According to the Year 40 Preliminary Con
10 Plan, more than 42 percent of
11 Philadelphia CDBG allocations will be
12 spent on operational costs. This is a
13 significant amount totalling more than
14 \$20 million. This puts a significant
15 drain on the potential funding for the
16 essential community organizations that
17 provide critical services.

18 Habitat also supports -- I'm
19 just about done -- the City's DCED
20 application for 300,000 in state grant
21 funds for residential and commercial
22 facade improvements as a way to leverage
23 the exciting opportunities of the Promise
24 Zone designation in Mantua, as well as
25 the Choice Neighborhoods federal grant

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 applications in Eastern North
3 Philadelphia.

4 Thank you very much for
5 everything that you do.

6 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:
7 Thank you for your testimony, sir.

8 Councilwoman? Councilwoman,
9 did you --

10 COUNCILWOMAN TASCO: I'll talk
11 to him on the side.

12 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: You
13 okay? Thank you.

14 MR. LANIER: I also have my
15 testimony to distribute.

16 Good evening.

17 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Good
18 evening.

19 MR. LANIER: Thank you for
20 allowing me the opportunity to present
21 testimony on behalf of the Neighborhood
22 Advisory Committees and Neighborhood
23 Action Centers, hereafter called NACs.
24 My name is Charles Lanier and I am the
25 Board President of Strawberry Mansion

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 Neighborhood Action Center as well as the
3 Interim Executive Director of the Hunting
4 Park Neighborhood Advisory Committee.

5 I have chosen as my theme "The
6 Choice - The Issue of Community Survival
7 in Philadelphia." I've made this choice
8 as a theme because it has become a matter
9 of survival for all of the committed and
10 dedicated NAC Board members, staff, and
11 volunteers that believe in the mission of
12 promoting the general development,
13 welfare, and well-being of all people
14 residing or established in the
15 communities of the City of Philadelphia,
16 utilizing established and innovative
17 methods of developing the community,
18 focusing primarily on, but not limited to
19 the areas of housing, education, economic
20 development, social welfare, neighborhood
21 beautification and recreation, without
22 displacing residents.

23 I emphasize innovative methods
24 because as NACs, we are the most
25 innovative and compassionate group of

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 people representing the population of
3 people we serve every day, the majority
4 of who are low- and moderate-income
5 individuals and families who may not have
6 the necessary resources to make a
7 difference in their lives. As NACs, we
8 make that difference.

9 We work long hours. We are the
10 ambassadors of our communities. We
11 provide services that allow our
12 communities to have access to programs,
13 events, and community activities and, in
14 many instances, we are the voice of the
15 community. In many of our communities,
16 through the use of community computer
17 labs, many of the community would be
18 facing severe barriers to the
19 technological information highway.

20 In addition to being the
21 advocates between the City and the
22 community, community organizers, and
23 information resource centers, we provide
24 services and programs that consist of,
25 but not limited to, basic systems repair,

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 weatherization, energy conservation,
3 energy programs (LIHEAP, CRISIS, UESF,
4 LICAP), housing counseling, heater
5 repair, emergency food centers, and
6 technology centers. We provide community
7 service briefings. We are also a
8 Registered Community Organization that
9 inform our communities about zoning
10 issues and we organize block captains,
11 conduct vacant property surveys, and have
12 community appreciation days, providing
13 free food, fun, information, and
14 entertainment to show our appreciation
15 for the continued support of our
16 residents.

17 Over the years, the NACs have
18 consistently been reduced and the service
19 area boundaries have consistently
20 increased and, at the same time, the
21 funding levels for NACs have consistently
22 been reduced. We have reduced staffing
23 levels that are underpaid, overworked,
24 and we are competing for funding for
25 program survival such as computer labs,

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 jobs for adults and youth, health
3 services, and our seniors.

4 We are called upon to support
5 and promote major City events, City
6 Council, RDA, PHDC, a host of other
7 organizations and services that are
8 related to the City of Philadelphia.

9 Our major funding source is the
10 Office of Housing and Community
11 Development, for which we are very
12 grateful.

13 Please, we are surviving, but
14 the struggle is getting harder and the
15 lack of resources makes our survival a
16 matter of choices, but what services do
17 we have to cut this year.

18 Please restore our funding
19 levels and increase the amount of funding
20 dollars needed so that we don't have to
21 make those choices.

22 Recommendation/Proposal: We as
23 NACs are required by the OHCD contract to
24 conduct and produce vacant property
25 surveys. We are required to convene

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 community meetings as an RCO to inform
3 the community of zoning requests and
4 services. We are required to support and
5 promote community economic development
6 projects and so forth. And whereas our
7 budgets have consistently decreased over
8 the last four years.

9 Please consider the following
10 recommendation/proposal: In accordance
11 with the proposal to increase revenues to
12 the Housing Trust Fund by an estimated
13 \$750,000 per year by raising the mortgage
14 deed and recording fees by just \$5. In
15 addition to the allocated funds provided
16 to the NACs, please consider increasing
17 the mortgage deed and recording fees by
18 an additional \$5, total \$10, to provide
19 an estimated \$750,000 per year to provide
20 adequate funding for NACs.

21 Thank you very much for
22 allowing me to present my testimony.

23 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:

24 Thank you, sir.

25 Ms. Dougherty.

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.

2 I'm sorry. The Chair
3 recognizes Councilman Jones. I think he
4 had a question for you.

5 COUNCILMAN JONES: You're in a
6 hurry to get out of that seat.

7 MR. LANIER: No, no, no, no.

8 COUNCILMAN JONES: Your
9 testimony was almost as fast as I think
10 Chip Kelly's would have been, but there
11 were some really good facts and I just
12 want to clarify to make sure.

13 How many NACs are in the City
14 of Philadelphia now?

15 MR. LANIER: Right now I
16 believe there are 19 -- between 19 and
17 20. I'm not sure, but it's been at --
18 the high for NACs has been like 43, and
19 that was years ago, many years ago. But
20 now that is almost reduced by half, if
21 not more.

22 COUNCILMAN JONES: And you
23 mentioned that even though the numbers
24 have been reduced, the areas they service
25 are larger?

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.

2 MR. LANIER: Yes. For example,
3 Strawberry Mansion, because of the -- our
4 service area has almost doubled because
5 of the reduction in the number of NACs in
6 our community. There was South Lehigh
7 that represented North Philadelphia, but
8 there's no longer a North Lehigh NAC, so
9 we have taken over the boundaries for
10 North Lehigh.

11 COUNCILMAN JONES: And you
12 rattled off a whole litany of services
13 that you provide. And if you could just
14 hit the top three or four.

15 MR. LANIER: The top three or
16 four? We provide the housing counseling
17 services. We provide energy -- we are
18 also funded as a neighborhood energy
19 center as well. We provide -- three or
20 four?

21 COUNCILMAN JONES: I'll read
22 the testimony. That's all right.

23 MR. LANIER: Just read the
24 testimony. It's all included.

25 COUNCILMAN JONES: And then

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 finally you came up with some creative
3 ideas about how to raise money in light
4 of the federal cuts. Could you repeat
5 some of them in a slower mode.

6 MR. LANIER: Sure. Thank you
7 very much for allowing me to do that.
8 Whereas, NACs are required by OHCD
9 contracts to conduct and produce vacant
10 property surveys; and

11 Whereas, NACs are required to
12 convene community meetings as an RCO to
13 inform the community of a zoning
14 request/variance presented to the Zoning
15 Board; and

16 Whereas, NACs are required by
17 the Zoning Board to attend and/or to
18 provide a letter supporting or not
19 supporting the zoning request or
20 variance; and

21 Whereas, NACs are required to
22 support and promote community economic
23 development projects, and we are required
24 to reach out to the business community in
25 our commercial corridors and support the

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 transformation of our neighborhood
3 centers, and as well as provide
4 residents, businesses, and developers
5 with assistance with the mortgage and
6 deed transfer process required for vacant
7 properties in our community and, of
8 course, the underfunding from the last
9 four years.

10 In accordance with the proposal
11 to increase revenues to the Housing Trust
12 Fund by an estimated \$750,000 per year by
13 raising the mortgage deed and recording
14 fees by just \$5. Our proposal is in
15 addition to the allocated funds provided
16 to the NACs, please consider increasing
17 the mortgage deed and recording fees by
18 an additional \$5, which will be a total
19 of \$10, to provide an estimated \$750,000
20 per year to provide adequate funding for
21 NACs.

22 COUNCILMAN JONES: Thank you,
23 sir.

24 MR. LANIER: Thank you.

25 COUNCILMAN JONES: Thank you,

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.

2 Mr. President.

3 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:

4 Thank you, Councilman.

5 MR. LANIER: Thank you.

6 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Good
7 evening.

8 MS. DOUGHERTY: Good evening,
9 President Clarke and City Council. Thank
10 you so much for letting me testify today.
11 I'm here with Terry Gillen, who needs no
12 introduction. Terry was a former Board
13 member of the Friends of the Free
14 Library.

15 Anyway, I'm here this evening
16 with some good news. We can get six-day
17 libraries back again after five years.
18 Mayor Nutter has put a restoration of the
19 Free Library's budget of 2.5 million in
20 his proposed budget, and I'm here to ask
21 all of you to ratify that so that we can
22 have six-day libraries everywhere in
23 every neighborhood in the City.

24 Just take you back down memory
25 lane to the fall of 2008, the FY09 budget

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 of the Free Library was 40 million, and
3 then of course it was cut by 20 percent,
4 or 8 million. And then we've
5 incrementally gone up, 32 million, 33
6 million, 35 million this year so that ten
7 branches can be open six days a week. So
8 just with 2 and a half million more, we
9 can get every library in the City open
10 six days a week. And we all love
11 libraries and we know why they're
12 important.

13 We need libraries for everybody
14 and in every neighborhood, for working
15 families who come home late, can't get to
16 the library, except for a Saturday; for
17 children and youth who are now traveling
18 sometimes half an hour to get to and from
19 school, they need to get to their
20 libraries on Saturday for homework, for
21 computers; for the 50 percent of
22 Philadelphians who do not have home
23 computers and need to apply for a job or
24 do some job training or learn how to
25 write a resume; or for those folks who

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 are signing up for the Affordable Care
3 Act and needed health insurance, they
4 went to their local library.

5 So I'm just asking you -- I'm
6 just here to ask you to please vote yes
7 for six-day libraries throughout the City
8 of Philadelphia by ratifying 2.5 million
9 for the Free Library of Philadelphia's
10 General Fund.

11 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:
12 Thank you. Thank you for your testimony.

13 MS. DOUGHERTY: Thank you.

14 MS. LEWIS: The next three
15 witnesses, Cornelia Swinson, Derek
16 Freres, and Larry Holman and Jennifer
17 Hawk.

18 (Witnesses approached witness
19 table.)

20 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Good
21 evening.

22 MS. SWINSON: Good evening.
23 Good evening, President Clarke and
24 members of City Council. My name is
25 Cornelia Swinson and I'm the Executive

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 Director of G'Town Restoration CDC, which
3 is located on Germantown Avenue in the
4 heart of Germantown and Cheltenham business
5 district. We are a non-profit, of
6 course, and we serve the Central
7 Germantown section of Northwest
8 Philadelphia. We were designated as a
9 Neighborhood Advisory Committee, a NAC,
10 in 2012. We're funded by the Office of
11 Housing and Community Development to
12 serve the Northwest.

13 We are one of what used to be
14 two NACs designated. There was the Mount
15 Airy NAC as well as the Germantown NAC,
16 and we are the newest NAC in Germantown.

17 We incorporate five core
18 objectives into our delivery of services.
19 Charles Lanier spoke primarily about them
20 when he presented his testimony, and
21 that's promoting sustainability, creating
22 employment opportunities, enhancing
23 neighborhood safety, and providing decent
24 affordable housing, and working in
25 partnership with local stakeholders to

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 foster community revitalization.

3 We were, as I mentioned
4 earlier, designated as a NAC in 2012, and
5 since then, we've accomplished the
6 following, and this is just a summary.
7 We've served 2,600 residents, Germantown
8 residents, by providing on-site linkage
9 and referral services such as mortgage
10 counseling assistance, housing, basic
11 systems repair, first-time home buyers,
12 credit assistance, landlord-tenant
13 issues, clean corridors, land use issues,
14 education and employment assistance, to
15 name a few. We've also been very
16 forward-thinking in developing policies
17 to support the NAC infrastructure,
18 including a community-driven election
19 process, which means that our Advisory
20 Board is elected by the residents that
21 live in the community and not our
22 organization. We've also developed
23 zoning procedures.

24 We were granted Registered
25 Community Organization status by the City

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 of Philadelphia Planning Commission and
3 assisted in convening what is called the
4 Germantown RCO Collaborative Group, which
5 hosts public community stakeholder
6 meetings to discuss proposed zoning
7 matters. We have at this time 12 RCOs in
8 Germantown, and that really impacts on
9 the ability to give a consistent
10 community public meeting a sense of
11 direction, and so we formed this group to
12 help us to meet that goal. Thus far, the
13 Germantown RCO Collaborative Group, we've
14 developed tools to assist and enhance all
15 our RCOs, and this is a critical
16 community service that they provide as
17 volunteers. Since we've been designated
18 as an RCO, we've worked to ensure that
19 there was inclusion of resident voices in
20 at least 24 zoning variance matters in
21 our neighborhoods, and that's just in the
22 last year.

23 We also have worked very
24 closely with Councilwoman Bass to
25 reconvene and reinvigorate the Germantown

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 Special Services District, which provides
3 needed service in the community. We also
4 work very hard to galvanize a
5 collaborative effort in Germantown to
6 clean it up, working with the Philly
7 Spring Cleanup program the City of
8 Philadelphia presents every year. We've
9 assisted businesses to open up, four to
10 be exact, in the Germantown section in
11 the last year, and we have -- we believe
12 that as an organization that is clearly
13 invested in the community, what we
14 provide is important.

15 And last I want to let you know
16 that Germantown is growing. There's a
17 lot of change in Germantown. We see
18 business opportunities in Germantown.
19 Yes, we have developers investing in
20 Germantown and, yes, the revitalization
21 of the Special Services District couldn't
22 come at a better time. Yet we know that
23 the concept of equitable development to
24 ensure that continued investment in the
25 growth of Germantown is racially and

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 economically inclusive that we must
3 champion it. The efforts of the G'Town
4 NAC will help to make sure that everyone
5 is included.

6 I want to thank you for
7 considering a special request, and that
8 is to support the allocation to increase
9 OHCD funding to specifically fund NACs
10 for the great work they provide in
11 marginalized neighborhoods.

12 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:
13 Thank you. Thank you so much for your
14 testimony.

15 MR. FRERES: I have some
16 testimony to turn in.

17 Thank you. My name is Derek
18 Freres and I'm here today representing
19 the Philadelphia Parks Alliance. I also
20 serve on the Boards of several park
21 groups, including the Friends of
22 Rittenhouse Square, the Fittler Square
23 Improvement Association, and the Friends
24 of Schuylkill River Park. These groups,
25 I, and others work in strong partnership

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 with the Department of Parks and
3 Recreation, Commissioner DiBerardinis and
4 Deputy Commissioners Slawson and Focht to
5 help improve and maintain the parks I
6 mentioned.

7 The Park Alliance commends the
8 Parks and Recreation leadership for their
9 tremendous efforts stretching every cent
10 they have to its maximum leveraging
11 alternative funding streams and
12 partnering with the community to
13 creatively maintain and improve their
14 buildings and parkland to the best degree
15 possible with the resources currently
16 available. Despite their model efforts,
17 Parks and Recreation is one of the most
18 underfunded departments in the City, and
19 the 10,000 plus acres of land that they
20 oversee reflects these funding
21 insufficiencies. While the average
22 budget for other City departments
23 combined has substantially increased over
24 the past decades, the budget for Parks
25 and Recreation has not. Philadelphia

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 spends just \$46 per resident on parks.
3 San Francisco, Seattle, Minneapolis, and
4 even Cincinnati spend five times that,
5 and Pittsburgh spends more than double.
6 We are among the lowest of major U.S.
7 cities in dollar spending per resident on
8 parks and on dollar pending per acre on
9 parks.

10 We commend this body for
11 increasing the Parks and Recreation
12 budget by 2.675 million for FY 2013.
13 Even with this increase, we are still \$5
14 million short of the \$9 million increase
15 promised, passed, and then taken away
16 from Parks and Recreation for FY 2009.
17 This was to be a permanent funding stream
18 for Parks and Recreation coming from a
19 hike in parking taxes that occurred for
20 FY 2009 and is still in place. These
21 monies are currently being collected, but
22 they are not going to parks and
23 recreation centers. As a result of this
24 broken promise, since FY 2009 the
25 Department of Parks and Recreation has

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.

2 lost over \$50 million it would have
3 received if the dedicated funding stream
4 passed for FY 2009 had been directed to
5 Parks and Recreation as promised.

6 Unfortunately, underfunding our
7 parks is not a new problem in
8 Philadelphia. Since the year 2000, Parks
9 and Recreation has lost 160 staff members
10 because of chronic underfunding.
11 Recreation facilities have been
12 understaffed, and in 2013, 15 recreation
13 centers had no staff members at all to
14 offer programming and 39 recreation
15 centers had just one. If this one staff
16 member is sick, kids lose a safe place to
17 go in the summer, on the weekends, and
18 after school. We know that
19 Philadelphia's parks and recreation
20 centers are the places where our city's
21 children go after school to do their
22 homework and play until their parents
23 finish work, to be outside on a spring
24 day, and have summer experiences in our
25 camps and pools. We also know that parks

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 are more than nice places to visit. They
3 are intimately tied to the City's
4 economic development. People want to
5 live where well-maintained green spaces
6 increase the value and desirability of
7 their neighborhoods, and we know these
8 spaces, when lively and well programmed,
9 decrease crime in adjacent areas.

10 For FY 2009, the Mayor and City
11 Council recognized the chronic
12 underfunding of Parks and Recreation and
13 approved a budget increase of \$9 million.
14 All of these promised funds were taken
15 away for FY 2009 as a result of the
16 City's and our country's wider economic
17 turmoil. For FY 2013, this body and the
18 Mayor passed a much-needed \$2.675 million
19 increase to the Parks and Recreation
20 budget that has helped bring on more
21 skilled trades workers to fix our roofs,
22 ensure electric and plumbing systems work
23 and much more. This year the Mayor has
24 proposed an increase to the Parks and
25 Recreation budget of just \$500,000 to add

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 programming staff. On behalf of the
3 parks with which I am associated, the
4 Philadelphia Parks Alliance and citizens
5 and parks across the City, I call on City
6 Council and Mayor Nutter to restore the
7 remaining \$5 million promised to Parks
8 and Recreation five years ago. This will
9 take us back to the budget passed by City
10 Council for FY 2009 and help us start to
11 provide the quality of parks our city and
12 its citizens deserve.

13 Thank you.

14 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:

15 Thank you for your testimony, sir.

16 MS. HAWK: Thank you. I
17 believe I'm going out of turn here.
18 Thank you. Good evening. My name is
19 Jennifer Hawk. I'm the Executive
20 Director of the Chestnut Hill Historical
21 Society, and I believe I already
22 submitted copies of our written testimony
23 to the gentleman at the door.

24 We're here today to especially
25 highlight the historic firehouse,

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 particularly the one in Chestnut Hill,
3 but those across the City and the needs
4 of those houses that house our fire
5 personnel across the City and what they
6 deserve, as well as for our particular
7 interest in preserving our historic
8 firehouse located in Chestnut Hill, and
9 especially in their preservation, but
10 also in the Capital Budget of purchases
11 of new fire equipment and that the
12 purchase of those fire equipment is
13 appropriate both to the size of the
14 historic firehouse but, more importantly,
15 to meet the particular needs of the
16 community.

17 The trucks that are already
18 deployed to our area already have a
19 challenge in getting around our small
20 streets. Larger trucks which are being
21 proposed would have an even greater
22 challenge of getting around our small
23 streets. Not only will it not fit into
24 the historic firehouse, one that was
25 designed by John T. Windrim in 1984 as

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 part of a set, the police station is now
3 gone, and one of the most significant
4 Richardsonian Romanesque architectural
5 features within the City and also one of
6 the few remaining Windrim designed. And
7 this was the height of the era of when
8 the City really designed these
9 magnificent buildings to highlight
10 municipal services. So not only would
11 larger trucks put that building at risk
12 and in any way to have to alter its
13 facade in order to fit them, but it also
14 really would put smaller streets at risk.
15 Small streets such as Caryl Lane where
16 the truck can barely get down it now,
17 Benezet, Navajo, Shawnee, just to name a
18 few. And I think this is probably an
19 issue that's not only just Chestnut Hill.
20 We're an historic city and we're a city
21 made up of small streets, and there are
22 custom-designed trucks that can be built,
23 but they need to be built and purchased.
24 We're also concerned about the
25 serious deteriorating conditions of the

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 firehouse in Chestnut Hill and understand
3 that Chestnut Hill is not alone in that.
4 Specifically, physically for the building
5 is, there's serious concern about the
6 roof that critically needs to be repaired
7 before the damage gets so far along that
8 it cannot be repaired. And we happen to
9 know that to do this in an historically
10 significant way would be 200,000,
11 300,000.

12 And one more last thing is, the
13 conditions -- what people don't know is
14 that the conditions within the firehouses
15 themselves. Our firefighters are
16 sleeping on cots that have to be 50 years
17 old, with mattresses that are one-inch
18 thin and clothes that are just absolutely
19 deplorable, unpainted buildings, water on
20 the walls. These are the people that we
21 expect to go out and save our lives in
22 very physical, hazardous, potentially
23 life-threatening conditions and they have
24 really poor kitchens and really poor
25 physical conditions, and I think we want

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 them to be the most well rested, well fed
3 of our personnel, and I think that they
4 deserve that. But we are particularly
5 interested in our historic places in
6 Chestnut Hill.

7 Thank you very much.

8 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:

9 Thank you so much for your testimony.

10 Sir.

11 MR. HOLMAN: Hello. My name is
12 Larry Holman. I'm a veteran and I'm
13 representing the Pointman Soldiers Heart
14 Ministry here today.

15 President Clarke and members of
16 City Council, it's an opportunity to be
17 with you, and I appreciate that.

18 President Clarke, I want to express my
19 appreciation to you for filling the
20 vacancy of the Director of the Veterans
21 Advisory Commission with Scott Brown.
22 I've met him several times. I'm very
23 impressed with him.

24 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:

25 Thank you.

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.

2 MR. HOLMAN: And I understand
3 that he will also be performing the
4 duties of the County Director of Veterans
5 Affairs --

6 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:
7 Correct.

8 MR. HOLMAN: -- as they are
9 performed in other counties in the state.

10 I haven't had access to that
11 part of the budget which affects the
12 veterans operation in the City, but I
13 just wanted to put some questions in the
14 record so that at some point the answers
15 to these questions can be made public or
16 accessible to veterans.

17 What role does the Philadelphia
18 Veterans Advisory Commission play in
19 developing the budget for that office?
20 Will that part of City Council budget be
21 made available to any veteran in
22 Philadelphia that wants to see it? And
23 how can a veteran get a copy or access it
24 online?

25 We want to know also by looking

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 at that budget if we can determine how
3 the Philadelphia Veterans Advisory
4 Commission is organized, and can we find
5 out if the Commissioners that constitute
6 the Veterans Advisory Commission each
7 have distinct roles and responsibilities
8 and what kind of accountability goes
9 along with that.

10 If the office had a separate
11 revenue stream, would it be able to
12 expand its budget, its staffing, and its
13 services to veterans? With 88,000
14 veterans in Philadelphia, veterans
15 programs are sure to bring a return on
16 investment, because most benefits come
17 through the federal government to the
18 veteran who then uses that to help the
19 economy of Philadelphia.

20 Some of the programs that I
21 think would be appropriate for that
22 office to get involved with would be
23 incarcerated veterans programs for
24 veterans and their families; claims
25 processing for veterans and their

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 survivors; expediting interactions
3 between veterans and the federal
4 Department of Veterans Affairs and the
5 state Department of Military and Veterans
6 Affairs and other providers of services
7 to veterans; and also to maintain a
8 veterans grades registry in Philadelphia
9 and ensure that all veterans in
10 Philadelphia get an appropriate funeral
11 and burial honors when they pass.

12 I want to make sure that the
13 folks at the Veterans Advisory Commission
14 are able to attend meetings of the
15 Pennsylvania State Veterans Commission
16 and the Pennsylvania War Veterans
17 Commission in Harrisburg and Fort
18 Indiantown Gap. So we want to make sure
19 that there is funding available to cover
20 that kind of transportation cost. And we
21 know that the more aggressive and
22 outreach and claims processing program we
23 have, the more federal VA dollars will be
24 getting spent in Philadelphia.

25 Thank you so much,

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.

2 Mr. President. I appreciate your help.

3 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:

4 Thank you so much for your testimony. Do
5 you have those questions in writing?

6 MR. HOLMAN: I'll be happy to
7 submit them later. I'll write them up
8 for you and get them in.

9 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Get
10 them to Will Carter or get them directly
11 to Scott, and we'll make sure you get
12 responses. And you know about the May
13 21st date for the Veterans Fair?

14 MR. HOLMAN: Yes. Thank you
15 very much.

16 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: We
17 actually have -- I understand we're going
18 to have somewhat of a celebrity at that
19 particular event. A good friend of ours,
20 a former congressman is going to be
21 there. I'm not supposed to talk about
22 it, but I think you can figure out who
23 that is. Has a TV show on MSNBC. And
24 I'm not going to say anything else, but
25 we'll have some really good people there.

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.

2 So I look forward to seeing you there.

3 Thank you very much for your
4 support.

5 MR. HOLMAN: Thank you very
6 much, sir.

7 MR. ACOSTA: How you doing,
8 Councilman? Thank you for having this
9 public testimony, to everyone in the City
10 Council.

11 I'm here today --

12 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Just
13 state your name.

14 MR. ACOSTA: My name is Orlando
15 Acosta. I'm sorry about that. I'm
16 basically here because I'm here to
17 basically talk about the truancy issue of
18 what's going on with a lot of families
19 around the District.

20 Now, the District basically has
21 a policy of 1.5, where a lot of families
22 if they don't live within that 1.5
23 radius, they can't even get bus service
24 or transportation service. Now, what I'm
25 systematically trying to work on is

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 trying to find out resources and ways to
3 help these families be able to get the
4 services they need as far as
5 transportation, because what the District
6 is not doing is, they're just putting
7 truancy officers on people's door without
8 finding out the fundamental reasons of
9 why their children might be truant.

10 Now, there's a lot of different
11 reasons why, you know, you have a truancy
12 issue, but what I'm systematically always
13 saying to the District is before you go
14 back and put someone under truancy, you
15 have to fundamentally find out the reason
16 why, and this is what they're not doing.
17 And what myself -- I mean, I just got bus
18 service today for my son, which I'm
19 gratefully happy of, but it took me
20 three, four months to navigate this whole
21 situation and process. And, I mean, I
22 had to go through hell to, you know, do
23 all that, because I kept giving them
24 information on things. They kept trying
25 to ignore it and not pay attention to it.

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.

2 So finally today, you know, through the
3 caseworker I was working with, we finally
4 broke through and they finally agreed to
5 give him bus service.

6 But the real reason is that
7 they need to find out systematically --
8 and with City Council I would like to
9 work together to find out -- to give
10 resources to other parents that's having
11 that issue, because systematically there
12 is a lot of families that's going to the
13 District telling them that they're having
14 hardships or whatever else. Now, on the
15 5th or the 7th when the next testimony
16 and public hearing, I would like to bring
17 other family members down here as far as,
18 you know, community individuals to give
19 you public testimony of what difficult
20 issues that they're going through.

21 And what I'm also finding out
22 is that a lot of families are having
23 issues of the minute that they say
24 something publicly, that, you know, they
25 show up on the door and really try to

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 systematically give the families hard
3 ways to go because they've said
4 something.

5 So the fundamental reason is
6 that I really want to give ways that
7 families can get over these hurdles,
8 because it shouldn't take anyone four to
9 five months to systematically just get
10 something that children need, which is
11 services or bus service or
12 transportation.

13 Now, I understand that the
14 state basically runs the majority of the
15 District, but it should be ways that we
16 can find here within the City that we can
17 work together to find out, whether it's
18 car pooling or companies that will accept
19 to give some aspect of ways that we can
20 work together, either with any
21 transportation service to get these
22 children to school, because if a
23 situation is transportation and that's
24 the only reason that they're not getting
25 to school on time, it's not academic

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 problems or anything like that, why
3 should you have a truancy office hounding
4 you or giving you issue because you have
5 a financial reason that you can't get a
6 child to school.

7 It took us -- it's \$100 -- \$100
8 to \$150 maybe, \$200 to go back and forth
9 for one month. So you have low-income
10 families that right now can't afford
11 that. Some of the families don't even
12 have heat, food or anything else.

13 So before you have a truancy
14 officer on the door, you need to find out
15 the reason why. Well, not City Council,
16 but I'm talking about the District
17 itself.

18 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:
19 Right.

20 MR. ACOSTA: So, you know, I'm
21 willing to really work with City Council
22 to find out other resources to do that,
23 because it's just real frustrating to see
24 the stress that families are going
25 through about just getting their children

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.
2 to school.

3 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:
4 Right. Okay. Thank you so much for your
5 testimony, and we'll have the School
6 District testimony I think May 5th.

7 MR. ACOSTA: The 5th.

8 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: May
9 5th. We'll talk to them.

10 Thank you so much for your
11 testimony.

12 Ms. Lewis.

13 MS. LEWIS: There are no more
14 witnesses this evening, sir.

15 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: With
16 that, I want to thank you and thank the
17 Councilmembers very much for being
18 present.

19 The Committee will stand in
20 recess until Wednesday, April 30th at
21 6:00 p.m., at which time we have a
22 neighborhood budget hearing at West Oak
23 Lane Charter School, located at 7115
24 Stenton Avenue, and that will be hosted
25 by Councilwoman Marian Tasco.

1 4/22/14 - WHOLE - BILL 140144, etc.

2 Thank you. Thank you all very
3 much.

4 (Committee of the Whole
5 recessed at 7:25 p.m.)

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CERTIFICATE

I HEREBY CERTIFY that the
proceedings, evidence and objections are
contained fully and accurately in the
stenographic notes taken by me upon the
foregoing matter, and that this is a true and
correct transcript of same.

MICHELE L. MURPHY
RPR-Notary Public

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