

COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA
COMMITTEE ON LEGISLATIVE OVERSIGHT

Room 400, City Hall
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19106
Wednesday, January 22, 2025
2:18 p.m.

PRESENT:

COUNCILMAN ISAIAH THOMAS, CHAIR
COUNCILWOMAN RUE LANDAU, VICE-CHAIR
COUNCILWOMAN QUETCY M. LOZADA
COUNCILMAN MARK SQUILLA
COUNCILMAN JEFFREY YOUNG, JR.

RESOLUTION: 240983

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2 COUNCILMAN THOMAS:

3 Today is Wednesday, January 22nd.

4 The time is 2:18 p.m. and we are
5 now ready to call to order the
6 Committee of Legislative Oversight.

7 Again, good afternoon
8 everyone. Welcome to Philadelphia
9 City Council session. I want to
10 thank my colleague Councilmember
11 Lozada for being here with me
12 today, and I now note that the hour
13 has come.

14 Mr. Maynard, are you
15 ready?

16 THE CLERK: Yes.

17 COUNCILMAN THOMAS:

18 Mr. Maynard, will you please call
19 the roll to take attendance.
20 Members that are attendance will
21 say aye to notify that you're
22 present.

23 THE CLERK: Vice-Chair
24 Landau.

1 (No response.)

2 THE CLERK:

3 Councilmember Lozada.

4 COUNCILWOMAN LOZADA:

5 Present.

6 THE CLERK:

7 Councilmember Phillips.

8 (No response.)

9 THE CLERK:

10 Councilmember Squilla.

11 (No response.)

12 THE CLERK:

13 Councilmember Young.

14 (No response.)

15 THE CLERK: And most

16 importantly, Chair Thomas.

17 COUNCILMAN THOMAS:

18 Present. Thank you, Mr. Maynard.

19 This hearing is now

20 called to order. This is the

21 public hearing of the Committee of

22 Legislative Oversight on Resolution

23 No. 240983.

24 Mr. Maynard, will you

1 please read the title of the
2 hearing resolution to be heard
3 today.

4 THE CLERK: Resolution
5 240983, authorizing the Committee
6 on Legislative Oversight to hold
7 hearings to receive the report of
8 the PHL Gaming Task Force to learn
9 about its findings and the actions
10 thus far taken and to review the
11 impact of this work on the vital
12 gaming and tech sectors in the City
13 of Philadelphia.

14 COUNCILMAN THOMAS:
15 Thank you, Mr. Maynard.

16 Before I call the first
17 panel, I just want to take a moment
18 to first and foremost talk about
19 the importance of the gaming
20 industry. For those who don't
21 know, this hearing is extremely
22 important to us as the City of
23 Philadelphia because gaming is one
24 of those industries that we want to

1 be recognized to be branded as it
2 relates to how people think about
3 our city.

4 Far too often when I
5 hear people describe the City of
6 Philadelphia through an economic
7 lens, we call Philadelphia the city
8 of eds, meds and beds. And if you
9 don't know, those eds represent our
10 institutions, those meds represent
11 our universities and those beds
12 represent the hospitality industry.

13 While all of those
14 things are great and great ways to
15 be branded as a city, we now know
16 we have a growing biotech scene
17 predominantly in the West
18 Philadelphia section so that's
19 becoming part of the narrative.
20 And as we begin to modify that
21 narrative to add biotech, my goal
22 and our advocacy as it relates to
23 the work that we're trying to do is
24 to make gaming a part of that

1 conversation.

2 We want Philadelphia to
3 be a gaming city. The gaming
4 industry is a multi-billion dollar
5 industry. And when you think about
6 the home of gaming, it doesn't
7 necessarily exist. We want to
8 compete with other cities, whether
9 they're in Canada, whether they're
10 in the South. We want to compete
11 with other cities to be known as
12 the city that's the home for gaming
13 in the gaming industry.

14 And so, with that
15 intentionality in mind we started
16 the PHL Gaming Initiative. Then we
17 moved into the PHL Gaming Task
18 Force, and today we're able to have
19 our first hearing to examine the
20 findings of the PHL gaming report
21 and to listen to recommendations
22 from experts in the gaming
23 community who are going to advise
24 us as it relates to what government

1 can do to turn that dream into a
2 reality and to have Philadelphia be
3 the gaming capital of the country
4 and hopes to be the gaming capital
5 of the world.

6 So I want to say thank
7 you all as it relates to every
8 member of the PHL Gaming Task
9 Force, and I also want to give a
10 huge, huge shout-out to my Chief of
11 Staff Dom Miller who has been the
12 point person from my office as it
13 relates to leading the Gaming Task
14 Force, leading the PHL Gaming
15 Initiative and fighting to make
16 sure that the gaming industry is
17 one of the most recognized and
18 important industries in the city of
19 Philadelphia as we start 2025 and
20 move forward.

21 So, Mr. Maynard, with
22 that being said, if you can please
23 call the first panel to testify.
24 But before you do that, I wanted to

1 take a moment to acknowledge the
2 presence of our Vice-Chair
3 Councilmember Rue Landau, who just
4 as a side note led a phenomenal
5 hearing this morning on an
6 important issue that also speaks to
7 the future of the City of
8 Philadelphia.

9 So, Councilwoman, thank
10 you for being here today, but most
11 importantly thank you for your
12 leadership as a new member of City
13 Council who's hit the ground
14 running. Folks would never have
15 known you were a new member. So
16 thank you. Thank you very much.

17 Mr. Maynard, the first
18 panel.

19 THE CLERK: Yes,
20 Mr. Chair.

21 The Committee will hear
22 from Tempest Carter from the
23 Commerce Department and Nicodemus
24 Madehdou, the Chief Executive

1 Officer of Jump Button Studios.

2 Nicodemus, I apologize
3 if I mispronounced your last name.

4 (Witnesses approached
5 Witness table.)

6 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Good
7 afternoon, Ms. Carter.

8 MS. CARTER: Good
9 afternoon, Chairman Thomas.

10 COUNCILMAN THOMAS:
11 Please state your name for the
12 record and please begin with your
13 testimony. We're so excited to
14 hear from you and your department
15 as it relates to today's topic.

16 MS. CARTER: Absolutely.
17 Hello. My name is Tempest Carter.
18 Good morning or good afternoon,
19 Chairman Thomas and the members of
20 the Committee on Legislative
21 Oversight. My name is Tempest
22 Carter. I am the Director of
23 Strategic Tech Initiatives in the
24 Department of Commerce.

1 I'm here to testify on
2 Resolution No. 240983, which
3 authorizes a public hearing
4 regarding the results of the PHL
5 Gaming Task force as well as
6 related efforts to support gaming
7 in Philadelphia. First, I want to
8 thank the Committee for recognizing
9 the tremendous potential of
10 Philadelphia's tech industry.

11 Gaming is a burgeoning
12 subsector that has seen impressive
13 growth in recent years. We've
14 witnessed a rise in gaming-related
15 events, new startups and
16 educational initiatives, all of
17 which contribute to making
18 Philadelphia an exciting hub for
19 innovation.

20 Our city is also home to
21 a growing number of gaming studios,
22 independent developers and
23 esports organizations. A notable
24 example is Nerd Street Gamers also

1 known as Localhost, which brought
2 the nation's first esports campus
3 to Philadelphia in 2021.

4 Since then we have
5 partnered with Nerd Street Gamers
6 on programming and connected them
7 with the School District of
8 Philadelphia to explore potential
9 afterschool activities. We are
10 also committed to supporting and
11 growing the third annual PHL Gaming
12 Conference scheduled for September
13 2025, which will be a key
14 opportunity to showcase the City's
15 leadership in that space.

16 Technology is one of the
17 Commerce Department's five priority
18 industries. We support
19 Philadelphia's tech ecosystem
20 through business development
21 attraction and retention. Our role
22 is to serve as a liaison for
23 businesses looking to invest and
24 expand in Philadelphia.

1 For example, we
2 proactively connect startups and
3 growth stage businesses to capital
4 readiness programs, investors and
5 accelerators. In addition, we
6 facilitate quarterly tech talks --
7 the next one is February 12th -- to
8 foster cross-industry learning and
9 collaboration. We would be happy
10 to host a dedicated gaming tech
11 talk to support industry leaders
12 and aspiring professionals, engage
13 with the latest trends, challenges
14 and opportunities in that space.

15 Philadelphia is home to
16 a wealth of academic institutions,
17 workforce programs and boot camps,
18 all of which provide multiple
19 pathways into this industry to
20 quality jobs. In the gaming
21 subsector, software development
22 jobs continue to represent a
23 significant portion of vacant tech
24 positions.

1 Many of the roles do not
2 require a college degree, but some
3 do require specialized skills that
4 can be gained through alternative
5 pathways such as boot camps or
6 self-taught programming. To
7 further assess and support the
8 growth of the gaming sector,
9 Commerce recently commissioned an
10 economic study of our own, which
11 will provide a detailed landscape
12 analysis and outline how the City
13 should invest and take the sector
14 to the next level.

15 The data confirms what
16 we already know. Philadelphia is
17 currently underinvesting in this
18 space, which is limiting our
19 ability to fully capitalize on the
20 opportunities available. With the
21 right investments, Philadelphia can
22 be the most diverse hub in the
23 region. However, we cannot achieve
24 this alone. We need strong public

1 and private sector collaboration
2 and investment to make this vision
3 a reality.

4 We look forward to
5 working alongside our partners to
6 support the continued growth in
7 this sector. Thank you for the
8 opportunity to testify today and I
9 am happy to answer any questions
10 you may have.

11 COUNCILMAN THOMAS:
12 Thank you. We are going to allow
13 the entire first panel to go.

14 Khenan, all right, so
15 you're after Nicodemus. Then
16 you'll provide your testimony and
17 then after this entire first panel
18 all three of you, then I'll open it
19 up for questions. Nicodemus.

20 MR. MADEHDOU: Hi --

21 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: I'm
22 sorry. Nicodemus, hold on. For
23 the record, I would like to
24 acknowledge the fact that our 5th

1 District Councilperson,
2 Councilmember Jeffrey Jay Young has
3 joined us.

4 Nicodemus, please state
5 your name for the record and you
6 can proceed with your testimony.

7 MR. MADEHDOU: Hi,
8 everyone. Thank you. My name is
9 Nicodemus Madehdou. I am the CEO
10 and co-founder of Jump Button
11 Studio, a games and animation
12 company crafting experiences that
13 are fun to play at home and away
14 from home. I'm also privileged to
15 be a partner and member of the PHL
16 Gaming and Tech Task Force here in
17 the city of Philadelphia.

18 19 years ago I first
19 discovered the world of games. I
20 never imagined I would be standing
21 here with City Council working
22 towards vital initiatives that not
23 only empower an industry that saves
24 lives every year but entertains

1 billions around the world. This is
2 an industry that has grown to be
3 economically bigger than movies and
4 music combined. One that can
5 inject --

6 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Hold
7 on. Say that again.

8 MR. MADEHDOU: This is
9 an industry that has grown to be
10 economically bigger than movies and
11 music combined. One that can
12 inject at minimum 80 million into a
13 local economy and if fostered and
14 empowered efficiently, over
15 \$1 billion into our local economy
16 that currently is being missed. We
17 are all here today for a very
18 important impact.

19 When our city succeeds
20 so does its residents, students and
21 workforce. We are the experts and
22 leaders shaping this local future
23 presently and together, with
24 unwavering support of City

1 Councilmember At-large Isaiah
2 Thomas, his Chief of Staff Dom
3 Miller, thank you.

4 We want those gathered
5 here today to take away one thing:
6 Philadelphia is positioned to be a
7 premier destination for gaming
8 careers and economic growth within
9 this decade should the proper
10 support from our home city be
11 provided to scale this workforce
12 sector.

13 Now, experience. Who am
14 I to be telling you what should be
15 considered or be done within the
16 city to empower new revenue, growth
17 and retention. While my career is
18 still very young, I've managed to
19 accomplish something generations of
20 my family never have through an
21 industry I love, not because of
22 financial opportunity but because
23 of social barriers and positive
24 impact it's made on me personally.

1 I immigrated to the
2 United States from Monrovia,
3 Liberia and started my journey on
4 Walsh Road in 2004. Imagine a
5 young 8-year-old kid turning 9 in a
6 new environment with absolutely no
7 friends, no knowledge of how to fit
8 in outside of my home and
9 struggling to have intentional
10 conversations out of fear of being
11 judged. Once I learned about
12 computers I found myself browsing
13 the internet and it did not take
14 long to find games. My world
15 shifted instantly.

16 I made my first friend
17 through playing games and they
18 happened to live right nearby in
19 the Walsh Road Apartments where I
20 was living. This was my cheat
21 code. I spent the years that
22 followed consuming the space and
23 eventually building in the space at
24 the start of high school, gained

1 recognition twice at the White
2 House during the Obama presidency,
3 received several local awards such
4 as the Philadelphia Geek Awards,
5 Billy Penn's Who's Next in STEM, 40
6 under 40 by the Knight Foundation,
7 Forbes Fellow and more, all while
8 bootstrapping our games company to
9 over 3 million in revenue and now
10 working towards closing our 3
11 million funding round. That's over
12 5 million by the age of 28 that
13 I've been privileged to empower so
14 many developers and future leaders
15 in our space with.

16 No one in my family has
17 ever been positioned to start and
18 attempt growing a business to that
19 scale that my team and I have
20 managed to accomplish, and this is
21 all thanks to the games industry.
22 We've worked with industry leaders
23 across Niantic, the company beyond
24 PokemonGO, Disney, Paramount, Rovio

1 and the list goes on, all of whom
2 are also industry leaders
3 dominating our space across the
4 country and empowering their
5 headquartered cities with millions
6 to billions in economic revenue
7 through games.

8 Today your experts,
9 capable of enabling the same growth
10 for our city, are taking the stand
11 and sharing now more than ever what
12 our city needs to empower this
13 sector intentionally so that we can
14 help bring more dollars, excitement
15 and residents to our city in all
16 the right ways while mitigating the
17 least amount of risk because we've
18 seen success over and over again,
19 and know just how much and what to
20 avoid.

21 So missed opportunity:
22 Montreal's game industry
23 contributes over 2 billion annually
24 to its local economy. California's

1 gaming sector generates over 50
2 billion in revenue while empowering
3 over 215,000 local jobs. San
4 Francisco injects over 80 million
5 annually simply through gaming
6 events alone. I could keep going,
7 but I believe our economic point
8 here is clear. Philadelphia is
9 capable of capturing this
10 opportunity for economic growth
11 while presenting thousands of new
12 jobs, opportunities. This leads to
13 stronger retention of our
14 competitive talents graduating from
15 Drexel, which you can find on Page
16 4, we're losing over 60 percent of
17 our talent.

18 We could keep a lot
19 more. Philadelphia is capable of
20 capturing its economic growth.
21 This leads to stronger retention of
22 our competitive talents which has
23 one of the -- Drexel has one of the
24 top 10 gaming education programs in

1 the country. As of today, 60
2 percent of those are leaving.

3 The City does not have
4 enough legislative and financial
5 resources directly tailored for
6 growing the games industry within
7 tech to enable the possibility of
8 growing to capture similar annual
9 dollars here in Philadelphia. And
10 our Task Force through
11 Councilmember At-large Isaiah
12 Thomas is primed to ensure, should
13 you all listen to us here today,
14 our city too can begin to grow a
15 sustainable games industry in
16 Philadelphia that many other cities
17 will one day adopt because we are
18 fortunate enough to have experts at
19 our doorsteps.

20 At minimum, we can most
21 definitely surpass San Francisco's
22 8 million, as Philadelphia is much
23 bigger. Philadelphia's larger size
24 and lower population density offers

1 more opportunities for expansion
2 and development, including spaces
3 for game studios, esports arenas
4 and tech hubs. And the lower
5 population density also positions a
6 leverage where we can attract more
7 talents and companies seeking
8 affordability.

9 So in conclusion, it's
10 time for change. Next year we
11 celebrate a massive milestone
12 within the city and it will miss on
13 multi-billions of dollars that
14 could have been enabled had we
15 already empowered the games
16 industry before now. Let's make
17 sure we don't miss that opportunity
18 next time. Thank you all for being
19 present here today. Collectively
20 we, Jump Button, PHL Gaming and the
21 Task Force in partnership with
22 Councilmember At-large Isaiah
23 Thomas are ready to ensure our city
24 captures a portion of the gaming

1 industry that's expected to grow to
2 470 billion by 2030 with a compound
3 annual growth rate between 8 to 10
4 percent.

5 Its current size as of
6 2023 is 220 billion, an industry
7 that grew to be bigger than movies
8 and music combined despite being
9 late in the game historically.
10 There's a real opportunity here and
11 the city should take it seriously.
12 Thank you.

13 COUNCILMAN THOMAS:

14 Thank you.

15 Before we open it up for
16 questions for this first panel,
17 we're going to allow Mr. Keenan
18 Newton to provide testimony and
19 then after Mr. Newton provides his
20 testimony, we'll open it up for
21 questions for members of the
22 Committee for this particular
23 panel.

24 Mr. Newton.

1 MR. NEWTON: Hey. Good
2 afternoon, everybody. My name is
3 Khenan Newton and --

4 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: I'm
5 sorry. Say your first name?

6 MR. NEWTON: Khenan
7 Newton.

8 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: I
9 apologize.

10 MR. NEWTON: Yeah. No
11 problem. I'm the Executive
12 Director of the Philly Game
13 Mechanics. Thank you,
14 Councilmember Thomas and the
15 members of the Council for your
16 time today. I am a gameplay
17 programmer with five years
18 experience in the industry. I've
19 released two games on Steam and
20 that's the world's largest video
21 game marketplace, online video game
22 marketplace. And I've reached over
23 30,000 players with these games
24 with the help of small- and medium-

1 sized content creators, and I've
2 led teams of over 15 developers on
3 more than a dozen game projects.
4 And since 2022 I've served as the
5 Executive Director of Philly Game
6 Mechanics.

7 And Philly Game
8 Mechanics is a project of Culture
9 Trust Greater Philadelphia, which
10 is a 501(c)(3) charitable trust.
11 We support game developers in the
12 Philadelphia region through grants,
13 networking events, skill-building
14 activities and business programs,
15 and our regular events include Play
16 Test Night, where developers will
17 bring prototypes and demos for live
18 feedback.

19 December 12, 2024 was
20 our 20th event of 2024 with over 40
21 attendees, that we get just about
22 each session. And in 2024 alone
23 we've seen 30 games come out of our
24 community, adding to about the 130

1 games we've developed over our
2 12-year history. Just to give you
3 an idea of what exactly comes out
4 of our community, so several games
5 found success.

6 So we have SNAKE FARM by
7 Heather Flowers with over 14,000
8 units sold on Steam. We got
9 SWORDCAR by Space Microscope
10 boasting 86 very positive reviews
11 on Steam, Timeworks by Starworks
12 Studios with 51 very positive
13 reviews on Steam, and Scattered
14 Verse by Tony (inaudible), which is
15 a mobile title with a 5 out of 5
16 score on Pocket Gamer. So despite
17 these successes, most games made
18 from within our community, say like
19 4 out of 130, they'll never see or
20 achieve this commercial traction.
21 Why? A lot of our developers often
22 lack the time and resources to
23 create projects ready for
24 publishers or investors, and that's

1 a big part of game success, is
2 finding those publishers and
3 investors.

4 While we excel in art
5 and technology, many of us need
6 more support when it comes to
7 marketing, design and business
8 development. Those are all
9 critical components of success. So
10 the Philly Game Mechanics, we're
11 currently run entirely by
12 volunteers and we don't have the
13 capacity to provide mentorship in
14 these areas.

15 To grow, we need a full-
16 time program director who can
17 establish programs to connect
18 developers with the resources they
19 need. So with more targeted
20 investments and grant opportunities
21 for communities like ours, Philly
22 Game Mechanics will be able to hire
23 full-time staff to launch a learn-
24 build-launch pipeline. Let's see,

1 this would be our effort to
2 emphasize learning by providing a
3 directory for game business
4 literature building impactful
5 projects and consistently bringing
6 games to market.

7 And finally, we would
8 benefit from yearly grant programs
9 targeted directly toward game
10 developers so our developers could
11 work on their own time and hire
12 contractors to create investor-
13 ready demos. So in closing, these
14 investments would not only
15 strengthen our community but also
16 help position Philadelphia as a hub
17 for creative and innovative game
18 development. So thank you for your
19 consideration and support.

20 Also, I have like
21 another little extra excerpt to
22 give you some more statistics on
23 how government intervention has
24 helped game studios bring revenue

1 to cities. So in 2022, the NYC
2 Mayor's Office of Media &
3 Entertainment introduced a Made In
4 New York marketing credit for
5 digital games, which awarded grants
6 for local indie studios.

7 For example, during the
8 2022 Game Devs --

9 COUNCILMAN THOMAS:

10 Sorry. Is that something that's
11 referenced in the report? The
12 recommendation you're reading right
13 now, is that referenced in the
14 report?

15 MR. NEWTON: I do not
16 believe so.

17 COUNCILMAN THOMAS:

18 Okay. All right. Go ahead.

19 MR. NEWTON: So in 2022,
20 the NYC -- yeah. So the 2022 Game
21 Devs of Color Expo, five grant
22 recipients collectively receive
23 more than 90,000 in funding
24 providing a crucial support for

1 their development projects, and
2 that's sourced from Welcome to
3 NYC.gov.

4 And another example
5 would be Iron Galaxy Studios, which
6 is one of the biggest indie studios
7 in North America. They benefited
8 from the support of the Orlando
9 city government during the
10 relocation to Downtown Orlando a
11 few years ago. So in 2022, the
12 city of Orlando's Commercial and
13 Residential Building Agency, the
14 CRA, approved a package of actions
15 to support the relocation of Iron
16 Galaxy Studios to Downtown Orlando,
17 including the public transportation
18 incentive and downtown living
19 incentive.

20 And Iron Galaxy Orlando,
21 LLC is a development studio that
22 helps other game developers create
23 their games through services --
24 through their services division,

1 and they also create their own
2 original games from time to time,
3 and Iron Galaxy Orlando, LLC was
4 approved for up to 135,000 in
5 funding assistance to create 90 new
6 high-value jobs over five years.

7 So in conclusion, there
8 are numerous other examples of
9 indie studios in the U.S. and other
10 parts of North America being
11 established and being able to grow
12 thanks to support from local
13 governments. The organizers of
14 Philly Game Mechanics and
15 (inaudible), we'd be happy to share
16 other examples with the
17 Philadelphia Council if requested.

18 COUNCILMAN THOMAS:

19 Thank you. We appreciate it.

20 A couple questions. So
21 first, Ms. Carter, thank you for
22 being here. Thank you for
23 representing the Administration.
24 Are there any other members of the

1 Administration that's joined us for
2 this hearing today, do you know?
3 Are you by yourself?

4 MS. CARTER: I am not by
5 myself. The Senior Director of
6 Life Sciences who also oversees my
7 work directly, Dr. Rebecca Grant,
8 is here as well.

9 COUNCILMAN THOMAS:
10 Awesome. So the reason I asked
11 that is because I had an
12 opportunity to speak with the Mayor
13 briefly about gaming and the gaming
14 industry. I had a conversation
15 with her directly and I really
16 wanted to push the Admin to
17 understand where we are as it
18 relates to the unique opportunity
19 we have to court gaming to the city
20 of Philadelphia. Nicodemus, who's
21 my tutor, he had a couple stats and
22 some data that I thought was really
23 important.

24 Nicodemus, can you just

1 on the numbers side, so you said
2 something that I asked you to
3 repeat and I'm going to ask you to
4 kind of go a little more indepth
5 right now. And if it's okay with
6 you, Ms. Carter, I would like to
7 hear from the Admin as it relates
8 to your appetite.

9 So, Nicodemus, you spoke
10 specifically about music and
11 movies. Are those the two
12 industries you talked about?

13 MR. MADEHDOU: Yes.

14 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: And
15 he talked about three different
16 areas. You talked about Montreal,
17 you talked about the state of
18 California and you talked
19 specifically about events in San
20 Francisco. So if you could just
21 elaborate specifically around
22 numbers. What do we know about
23 music and movies compared to
24 gaming? And then what do we know

1 about events in San Francisco,
2 anything that can be replicated?

3 And then of course for
4 you, Ms. Carter, if we can hear the
5 Administration's appetite for us to
6 replicate some of this stuff, that
7 would be definitely beneficial.

8 Nicodemus.

9 MR. MADEHDOU: Sorry.
10 Could you repeat -- do you want me
11 to --

12 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: I
13 want numbers. So you told us --

14 MR. MADEHDOU: Got it.

15 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: I
16 mean, I'm thinking about
17 Councilmember Young, right. I got
18 to get his vote. So there's one
19 thing for us to say that one
20 industry is more lucrative than the
21 other, but this guy's a lawyer. He
22 wants proof, so help us out a
23 little bit. And then I got another
24 lawyer to my right. I'm struggling

1 right now.

2 MR. MADEHDOU:

3 Definitely, definitely. Montreal,
4 they contribute over 2 billion
5 annually to their local economy
6 through gaming.

7 COUNCILMAN THOMAS:

8 Montreal is what we would probably
9 consider a city that's a gaming
10 city right now, right?

11 MR. MADEHDOU: Correct.

12 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: But
13 we all know Montreal is in Canada.

14 MR. MADEHDOU: Correct.

15 COUNCILMAN THOMAS:

16 Okay.

17 MR. MADEHDOU:

18 California, their gaming sector
19 generates over 50 billion in
20 revenue while employing over
21 215,000 local residents in gaming,
22 50 billion. And San Francisco,
23 through events alone, generates
24 over 80 million annually through

1 gaming.

2 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: What
3 type of events do they do in San
4 Francisco? Is there anything
5 similar to what we do with the
6 conference?

7 MR. MADEHDOU: It's very
8 similar, very similar. We have out
9 there -- they have a lot of tech-
10 related events that bleeds into
11 gaming. You have your A16Z, big
12 investment firm out there that
13 host -- they have their similar
14 San Francisco Tech Week similar to
15 what we have here, Philly Tech
16 Week, only because they have a lot
17 of gaming-involved components.
18 They are able to generate a lot
19 more than our Philly Tech Week I'd
20 imagine generates for our city.

21 So if we were able to
22 empower a lot more gaming
23 activations within our "Philly Tech
24 Week," I imagine it is very

1 possible we're able to meet the
2 same 80 million annually to bring
3 it to our city locally with the
4 right support, at minimum.

5 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: So
6 when you talked about San Fran --

7 MR. MADEHDOU: Cisco.

8 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: --
9 California, not the events. When
10 you talked about California and the
11 revenue with a B and the number of
12 jobs, why would a business be
13 incentivized -- like the cost of
14 living in California is so high,
15 right, and California is clearly
16 not as transit as some of our East
17 Coast cities. We're talking a lot
18 about SEPTA, public transportation,
19 people being able to walk places.
20 Why would a person like yourself be
21 in California instead of being in
22 Philadelphia?

23 MR. MADEHDOU: Because
24 Philadelphia does not support our

1 ecosystem the right way. I believe
2 one of the hearings you'll hear
3 later will be one of our leaders
4 here in the city with a game
5 company that had to start their
6 journey by leaving the city because
7 they couldn't find the right
8 opportunities here.

9 So if we are unable,
10 similar to the 40 percent on Page 4
11 in the report, that we're losing to
12 the students that are graduating
13 from Drexel because they don't
14 have, one, job opportunities that
15 want to keep them local or, two,
16 good-paying job opportunities or,
17 three, city-incentivized and
18 support legislation that empowers
19 the companies that are locally here
20 within that sector to want to
21 remain and empower more job
22 opportunities.

23 So none of those things
24 exist here in Philadelphia whereas

1 California they've seen the
2 lucrative wins of the gaming
3 industry, so it is more favored and
4 they have all of those structures
5 there that empower that.

6 COUNCILMAN THOMAS:
7 Councilmember Young has a point of
8 information.

9 COUNCILMAN YOUNG: I
10 have more of a question. I'll wait
11 until you finish, Councilmember.

12 COUNCILMAN THOMAS:
13 You're sure?

14 COUNCILMAN YOUNG: Yeah,
15 I'm positive.

16 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Go
17 ahead, bro.

18 COUNCILMAN YOUNG: So
19 what does the gaming infrastructure
20 look like, right? What is
21 necessary for us to build out, to
22 fit out spaces and places where the
23 gaming industry can thrive here in
24 Philly?

1 So you're looking at
2 what -- I guess I had this question
3 for the Drexel professor as well.
4 If you look at what San Francisco
5 is, as you mentioned, we're a much
6 larger, denser city but it has all
7 the resources that are necessary,
8 what are we missing here in
9 Philadelphia for that gaming
10 infrastructure to really thrive?

11 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: And
12 when you answer my last question,
13 you referenced Page 4 of the
14 report. When you answer
15 Councilmember Young's question,
16 please continue and other panelists
17 continue to reference the report.
18 All of the information is here for
19 members. So as you answer if
20 there's a reference point that
21 happens to be in the report, please
22 include that in response.

23 MR. MADEHDOU:
24 Definitely, definitely. Page 3 of

1 the report will give you a glimpse
2 into why we believe gaming is prime
3 and capable of being grown in our
4 city, whereas what other cities are
5 doing, Nick Madonna, another
6 individual that'll be speaking
7 here, has a lot of thoughts towards
8 the tax incentives, right, that
9 empower the job opportunities that
10 are offered to the people that are
11 hired, the offerings of financial
12 investments, mentorship, et cetera,
13 all of those things are more
14 lucrative out West essentially and
15 they are provided and empowered by
16 the city too in addition to the
17 firms and companies that are
18 fueling the gaming economy
19 financially.

20 So when we look at
21 Philadelphia, we're missing
22 legislative action, right, that
23 empowers tax incentives and other
24 hiring benefits and funding, a lot

1 of funding.

2 COUNCILMAN YOUNG: Why
3 do you think those investments are
4 being made out West versus here in
5 Philly outside of the tax
6 incentives, right? I mean, a city
7 like Philadelphia, an East Coast
8 city, as Councilmember Thomas was
9 saying we have everything that any
10 corporation, any business, any
11 investor could need here in
12 Philadelphia. So is it the weather
13 in San Francisco? Like, what is it
14 that makes that more popular
15 than --

16 MR. MADEHDOU: Their
17 city understands the importance of
18 gaming. That's the difference.
19 Their city understands the
20 importance of gaming and they
21 empower it. That's what's missing
22 here.

23 MS. CARTER: I think
24 also from an investment standpoint

1 when you're looking at various
2 types of investment, it's a center
3 for venture capital so there are no
4 gaps in terms of what can be
5 invested upon and it's very easy to
6 kind of tap into those networks out
7 West, particularly in the Bay Area
8 in San Francisco.

9 So when we partnered
10 with Pegasus Tech Ventures, which
11 is a venture capital firm that has
12 over \$1.6 billion out in
13 investment, they're based in San
14 Francisco. And the finale of that
15 start of World Cup happened in
16 San Francisco. There's just a lot
17 of money there on top of over 60
18 years of investment, both in
19 creating the infrastructure but
20 also from their anchor institutions
21 with their colleges and
22 universities to kind of support
23 tech in general and gaming in
24 particular.

1 And so, we're burgeoning
2 and we're building that, but
3 there's still some gaps
4 particularly when we look at
5 investment for those not raising
6 their first \$5,000, \$10,000 but are
7 looking for 20 million, 30 million,
8 their first 10, their first 5.

9 It's like a death valley
10 here. And so, being able to
11 attract more investment into the
12 city is pivotal and we can do that
13 through a host of different ways.
14 When you look at Ohio, when you
15 look at New York, when you look at
16 Chicago, they have their own kind
17 of venture funds set up and venture
18 studios set up within the city and
19 sometimes brokered by the city or
20 state to help to invest in those
21 startup companies and we don't have
22 that currently in the same way as
23 you would see in California and
24 other places.

1 COUNCILMAN YOUNG: Those
2 funds that you mentioned, are they
3 publicly-run funds essentially?

4 MS. CARTER: Often times
5 they're private. So you will have
6 investors coming in, whether
7 they're angel investors or
8 sometimes these places aren't --

9 COUNCILMAN YOUNG: I
10 thought so.

11 MS. CARTER: They
12 haven't had IPO yet so they're not
13 on the stock market sometimes.

14 COUNCILMAN THOMAS:
15 Yeah. I think we're in a catch 22
16 situation though because if we say,
17 well, we want to wait for the
18 private sector to be able to come
19 up with the appetite and the money
20 to be able to provide the
21 philanthropy dollars that you're
22 mentioning, then we're going to be
23 waiting a long time, because out of
24 the top 10 employers in the city of

1 Philadelphia, only one is in the
2 private sector.

3 MS. CARTER: Absolutely.

4 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: So
5 we're struggling for reasons that
6 don't necessarily relate to this
7 conversation to get that type of
8 appetite for any type of venture
9 capitalist in the philanthropy
10 community. And so, I think for us
11 we want to know, and I guess this
12 leads to my question for you, what
13 do you think -- and I know you're
14 limited in what you can respond
15 with -- but listening to all of the
16 things that's been discussed thus
17 far and we're going to go indepth
18 into more dialogue as it relates to
19 the next two panels, what do you
20 think the Admin has an appetite
21 based on what you've heard thus far
22 as well as what is in the report,
23 specifically recommendations for
24 what local government can do?

1 MS. CARTER: Right. So
2 the Administration and Commerce in
3 particular, they are deeply
4 interested in making sure that
5 we're able to retain talent and
6 that we're able to partner and
7 create more private and public
8 collaboration so that we're able to
9 platform this city in a way that
10 will attract those dollars that we
11 need, right.

12 And so, being able to
13 kind of work together to make sure
14 that the PHL Gaming, the third one
15 that happens in September is even
16 larger, that were able to create
17 more kind of inroads and
18 collaboration when you are engaging
19 with these smaller startup
20 companies that were able to have
21 larger conversations about the
22 incentives that we do have, right.
23 Things that aren't talked about
24 right now is quality jobs. The

1 quality jobs program which is
2 incredible and gives \$5,000 for new
3 jobs that are life-sustaining, so
4 if you have a company that's
5 growing from 7 to 15, you can
6 really get dollars that are
7 unrestricted that are going to be
8 able to help you grow, and then
9 we're also doing an incentive study
10 on top of the tech industry study
11 that I'm doing that'll be public in
12 the next few weeks that'll tell
13 what exactly we'll be able to do in
14 terms of recommendations.

15 But I think that we're
16 on the right step, right track in
17 terms of more collaboration between
18 us making sure that we're getting
19 these anchor institutions to kind
20 of understand and put more kind of
21 skin in the game and then looking
22 to see what incentives are working
23 and what incentives aren't so that
24 we're able to create an incentive

1 package to be more attractive as a
2 city.

3 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: So I
4 love to hear the appetite and I'm
5 going to recognize Councilmember
6 Mark Squilla who's joined us for
7 today's conversation. Just a
8 couple more things that I think we
9 can do that's outside of the
10 report. We're going to continue to
11 examine things in the report on the
12 next panel. We're going to ask for
13 that to be a part of the
14 conversation.

15 We actually spoke with
16 the folks at the Library
17 Foundation, and we're hoping and of
18 course we're not going to ask you
19 to answer this right now, we're
20 hoping that we can work with the
21 Admin, the Library Foundation, the
22 Director of the Library to begin to
23 see what a partnership could look
24 like to provide gaming spaces in

1 our libraries. Our libraries are
2 unique spaces.

3 On our next panel we're
4 going to talk about some of the
5 professions that's in the gaming
6 industry, because again I can play
7 a little 2K and a little Madden but
8 that's where it stops for me, and
9 I'm sure most folks are limited
10 like I am as it relates to
11 understanding the professions in
12 the gaming industry.

13 But I think a lot of
14 people when we think about gaming,
15 we think about the act of playing a
16 video game which could fit at a rec
17 center or something like that. But
18 if I'm a programmer, if I'm a
19 developer, if I'm a professional in
20 the gaming industry, I probably
21 would rather be in a library than a
22 rec center, right. I probably need
23 more quiet than chaos.

24 So I'm wondering for a

1 little bit of homework we can see
2 if the Admin would entertain or
3 have an appetite for collaborating
4 with the Library Foundation as well
5 as the library to provide more
6 tools, programs, resources and
7 initiatives in our libraries so
8 that our libraries can become a
9 gaming hub for young people in
10 neighborhoods across the city of
11 Philadelphia. That's one thing.

12 You mentioned the gaming
13 conference. That's the next thing.
14 The third thing if we do get to the
15 point where we entertain the idea
16 of a big developmental project,
17 folks are talking about East Market
18 Street in South Philadelphia. If
19 those things happen, we would ask
20 that the Admin include some of that
21 stuff in -- I mean, include gaming
22 in some of those negotiations
23 because gaming can be that
24 experience that changes a corridor,

1 right.

2 It's one thing to say
3 that I want to have a retail.
4 Retail is great, right. I'm not
5 going to never knock retail. But I
6 know for me I like to spend my
7 money on an experience, right. And
8 what the gaming industry often
9 offers is a specific unique
10 experience and I think that's what
11 we should be thinking about as we
12 continue the innovative thinking
13 that the Admin has led since our
14 Mayor has been sworn in. That's
15 the type of push we want to see to
16 try to make gaming a priority.

17 The Chair recognizes
18 Councilmember Squilla and then
19 we're going to try to move on to
20 the next panel.

21 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA:

22 Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

23 And you actually took
24 the words out of my mouth because I

1 was even thinking of the Wanamaker
2 building and reimagining that and
3 looking at spaces, that we could
4 say is there an opportunity if we
5 build it, they will come, right.
6 Is there an area we're saying who
7 would want to rent a space like
8 this or I remember when in South
9 Philly they were talking about
10 maybe a 2500; 5,000 seat arena for
11 gaming three or four years ago or
12 five years ago and then somehow
13 that fell off the radar.

14 But I think that's
15 something if it's a possibility to
16 get a venue just for those type of
17 events but only if we have enough
18 people that are in the city
19 interested in doing that. And I
20 guess at some point somebody
21 thought I guess it wasn't
22 profitable or whatever the reason
23 was it didn't happen, but if we
24 re-envision East Market or South

1 Philly or some of these other
2 places, is it possible to connect
3 them with people who would be
4 willing to lease spaces that had
5 this type of setup in there? And
6 if we did, we could even help
7 market that, right, as a city and
8 saying, all right, there's a need,
9 right. And if we build it, they
10 will come and we'll be able to fill
11 these spaces, because the worst
12 possible thing is I remember we did
13 this with some of our other
14 buildings and we were building out
15 life science buildings and then we
16 weren't able to fill any of them,
17 right, so it became a challenge.
18 But if we were able to build out
19 some of these spaces here and say,
20 all right, by working with you
21 guys, working with the Chairman and
22 the Mayor's office, say let's look
23 to build these out and let's make
24 sure that we could have the ability

1 to do that so that we could attract
2 you guys and other people in the
3 business to come there and say
4 we're going to rent these, we're
5 going to use these places and then
6 it becomes a hub, right. And
7 that's what I think we need to do.
8 And I think thinking outside the
9 box and being creative about it is
10 something we as a city could do as
11 we continue our planning process.

12 MS. CARTER: I know the
13 Commerce Department is committed to
14 exploring and figuring out how we
15 can better attract and retain and
16 grow tech in all its spheres
17 including gaming, so I'm really
18 excited to see. I look at this as
19 kind of a springboard for us to
20 jump into deeper collaboration,
21 right, utilizing this report,
22 utilizing the report that will come
23 out in a few weeks around tech in a
24 more broad sense and figuring out

1 what we can do together to make
2 sure that we have a thriving
3 innovation hub within the city.
4 And we do have EDA designation as a
5 tech hub, so how do we utilize that
6 to be able to draw more light into
7 what is happening in gaming and
8 what's happening in various other
9 sectors within tech. I think that
10 is going to take creativity and
11 work, but I think that we can do it
12 and I'm excited for us to be on
13 that partnership together.

14 MR. MADEHDOU: And if I
15 may, I believe COVID impacted some
16 of those arena gaming plans. And
17 Pages 12 through 17 in the gaming
18 report also dives in so much more
19 detail around ways in which the
20 city can collaborate with existing
21 experts here to more empower, bring
22 in at minimum 80 million into the
23 local economy and high 1 billion or
24 more into the local economy.

1 COUNCILMAN THOMAS:

2 Thank you. As we close this panel
3 out, I want to thank you both. I
4 want to ask you if there's anything
5 else you want to add. Nicodemus, I
6 think you blew a lot of us away
7 when you talked about the fact that
8 the gaming industry is more than a
9 music and movie industry combined.
10 That creates the appetite for local
11 government to do our due diligence
12 to attack this.

13 But as we close out, if
14 there's anything you want to add,
15 specifically any highlights in the
16 report that you didn't get to
17 discuss that you might want to put
18 out there and anything around tax
19 credits as well too. I think it'll
20 be good for the members of Council
21 to hear about recommendations
22 around tax credits and then we can
23 get ready for the next panel.
24 Thank you both.

1 MS. CARTER: Thank you.
2 From the Commerce perspective
3 without Revenue being here and
4 being able to have like a full
5 proposal, we wouldn't be able to
6 condone any tax credit. But I am
7 really interested in what broader
8 incentives we'll be able to create
9 maybe together that go beyond the
10 tax credit issue and maybe more
11 into generative grants and larger
12 kind of fiscal investment. And so,
13 I'm really excited about that.
14 And when I look at the
15 sort of investments that we need to
16 make, I look at the median tech
17 income in Philadelphia which is
18 right now at 109,000. It can go up
19 to 141,000 depending on whether
20 it's research and development. And
21 I think that that is revolutionary
22 when we're talking about our most
23 marginalized communities getting
24 access to that type of life-

1 sustaining wage, we see the fruit
2 of what gaming and what tech can do
3 in the city can make millionaires
4 out of our neighborhood residents.
5 And so, I'm very interested and
6 very committed to figuring out the
7 ways in which we can kind of grow
8 that pie so that we're able to
9 equitably distribute it more.

10 COUNCILMAN THOMAS:

11 Thank you and thank you to the
12 Admin for representing the Mayor.
13 Thank you.

14 MS. CARTER: Thank you.

15 MR. MADEHDOU: My
16 colleagues will definitely speak
17 much better than I can on a lot of
18 direct city support. I've said a
19 lot of what I had to say, but thank
20 you especially Councilmember
21 At-large Isaiah Thomas for
22 spearheading and being committed to
23 the PHL Gaming Task Force and the
24 events we have done to be able to

1 put together this report and be
2 very authentic and true to what and
3 how we can impact Philadelphia
4 locally.

5 COUNCILMAN THOMAS:

6 Great job. Thank you both --

7 MS. CARTER: Thank you
8 for your leadership.

9 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: --
10 and if you can stay around and
11 listen to the other panels so we
12 can figure out how we can work with
13 the Admin, turn some of this stuff
14 into action items.

15 MS. CARTER: Yes,
16 absolutely.

17 COUNCILMAN THOMAS:
18 Mr. Maynard, will you please call
19 the members of the next panel to
20 testify before us.

21 THE CLERK: Of course,
22 Mr. Chair.

23 The Committee will now
24 hear from Professor Robert Lloyd

1 and Adrian Sandoval. Gentlemen, if
2 you'll make your way to the podium.

3 (Witnesses approached
4 Witness table.)

5 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Good
6 afternoon to you both. Thank you
7 for taking the time for being here.
8 Thank you for being patient. We
9 appreciate your patience. Please
10 begin by stating your name for the
11 record and you can begin with your
12 testimony. We'll allow you both to
13 testify. And then after you both
14 finish your testimony one after the
15 other consecutively, we'll open it
16 up for questions from members of
17 the Committee. Thank you both.

18 MR. LLOYD: Excellent.
19 My name is Robert Lloyd, Professor
20 at Drexel University.

21 MR. SANDOVAL: My name
22 is Adrian Sandoval. I'm an Adjunct
23 Professor from Drexel University
24 and also the Chair of the

1 Philadelphia Chapter of the
2 International Game Developers
3 Association.

4 MR. LLOYD: So I have
5 graphics that I believe you have
6 printouts of that will have
7 additional information to accompany
8 my testimony. But first, I want to
9 thank Councilmember Thomas, his
10 Chief of Staff Dom Miller and the
11 Council for giving us this
12 opportunity today.

13 My name is Rob Lloyd. I
14 started at Temple University as a
15 studio artist and joined a local
16 simulation company, creating a
17 variety of training and simulation
18 projects, including the award-
19 winning Wild Earth at the
20 Philadelphia Zoo and the NASTAR
21 Training Center in Southampton, Pa
22 which is train civilian and
23 military pilots plus hundreds of
24 people preparing to go to

1 suborbital flights with Virgin
2 Galactic and others.

3 I joined the faculty at
4 Drexel a decade ago and have since
5 become a Program Director for the
6 Game, Design and Production program
7 or GDAP as I'll refer to it, the
8 undergraduate degree program which
9 is what brings me here today.

10 The Digital Media
11 Department, which houses the game
12 design program, began as a program
13 itself under the Film Department
14 over 25 years ago and has since
15 grown to be its own department with
16 multiple degree programs underneath
17 it, including the game program as
18 well as a Master's and Ph.D.
19 programs. You can be a doctor of
20 digital media with Drexel.

21 This year we will
22 graduate our 25th class, including
23 about 40 game majors. With their
24 partners from music industry

1 programs, custom design major and
2 computer science, the seven current
3 senior game teams represent about
4 75 graduating students looking to
5 enter the game development
6 industry.

7 The Game program
8 currently has about 200 majors,
9 plus a new minor that we've opened
10 and hundreds of computer science
11 majors that are taking game-related
12 concentrations. It's a lot of
13 students studying game development.

14 The Drexel Game Design
15 program is ranked by Princeton
16 Review as a top game design program
17 in the nation. We've been
18 consistently in the top group from
19 when there were only a few, a
20 handful of digital content creation
21 degree programs in the nation to
22 now when there are hundreds, and
23 I'm very proud of that consistency.

24 Our cohort continues to

1 grow and evolve, and there's
2 demographics on the slide graphic.
3 While not yet a mirror of society,
4 we are trending in the right
5 direction with increased gender,
6 racial, ethnic and neurodiversity.
7 This diversity of voices is
8 important for many reasons. But
9 for today, I want to point to how
10 that diversity feeds the indie game
11 dev scene and with countless untold
12 stories that make the indie art
13 scene so vital and vibrant.

14 Our students come from
15 all over the globe, but about 40
16 percent of them come from the state
17 of Pennsylvania, and most of them
18 within the immediate region.
19 However, over half of them leave
20 the state of Pennsylvania upon
21 graduation and you heard in the
22 report has the larger number of 60
23 percent leave the city of
24 Philadelphia. They leave the

1 state, they leave the city to find
2 work and build their careers
3 elsewhere. And I think this
4 Council can help change that, and
5 this report and this effort is the
6 beginning of it.

7 Together we can improve
8 the business environment to support
9 more game dev and related companies
10 growing in the area, providing more
11 game dev opportunities for students
12 in Drexel's 100-year-old
13 cooperative education program,
14 providing more opportunities for
15 graduates to stay in the area
16 working for a more robust local
17 game dev industry.

18 Our students work for
19 small indies companies, mid-sized
20 companies all the way up to major
21 AAA studios and Fortune 500
22 companies. Beyond a couple of
23 small indies in Philadelphia and
24 other limited opportunities in the

1 region, the vast majority of those
2 companies and opportunities for our
3 cooperative education students as
4 well as our graduates are
5 elsewhere.

6 Our students have
7 started companies, some of them
8 incredibly successful, but the most
9 successful have started them
10 elsewhere. Greg Lobanov graduated
11 from digital media before the game
12 program was specifically branched
13 off. He graduated in 2014. He is
14 a Philadelphia native. He has his
15 company based in Vancouver, Canada.
16 His titles are critical and
17 commercial successes and his latest
18 title, Beasty Ball, even calls back
19 to the Philadelphia sports scene
20 and he has a character based on
21 Gritty who PhiladelphiaVoice just
22 had an article on him.

23 Recently Dan Fornace, a
24 digital media graduate from 2011,

1 has grown his Rivals of Aether game
2 into a franchise with multiple
3 titles under that franchise and an
4 exciting esports scene attached to
5 it. We've actually held esports
6 tournaments at Drexel using his
7 titles. His company is based in
8 Seattle, Washington.

9 Drexel has an on-campus
10 incubator, the Entrepreneurial Game
11 Studio or EGS. Over the last
12 decade with limited funding and
13 resources, our Game faculty,
14 Dr. Frank Lee and Tony Rowe have
15 helped launch a dozen or so student
16 companies representing over 50
17 students and a dozen or two
18 commercial titles available on a
19 variety of commercial marketplaces.
20 Some of those will be represented
21 in testimony later today.

22 While startups are
23 inherently risky, only about three
24 of those studios have persisted

1 past graduation. The learning
2 experience of that startup is
3 invaluable no matter what. I
4 believe this Council, this effort,
5 this report is the beginning of
6 increasing the success rate of
7 those locally EGS-launched
8 companies.

9 Many game developers
10 from industry have come to
11 Philadelphia for family
12 connections, cost of living and
13 quality of life. I'm constantly
14 running into new people who have
15 come here for those reasons, to
16 bring their industry here. These
17 are factors that are not easily
18 created out of thin air.
19 Philadelphia has proudly built them
20 up over time. With additional
21 support from this Council, from
22 this effort, we can jumpstart and
23 support the growth of the existing
24 indie game development community

1 that's already here into a
2 healthier, sustainable, profitable
3 and noteworthy industry.

4 Importantly, most indie
5 game companies survive through a
6 combination of their own original
7 intellectual property, their own
8 original titles that they build,
9 predominantly they're keeping their
10 lights on through contract work and
11 grant work. That original IP is an
12 iterative, experimental, tricky
13 process.

14 The ideas may not make
15 it past that initial stage. Yet
16 they still need to be funded to
17 keep the lights on. Philadelphia
18 talent from companies that can't
19 keep the lights on find other
20 solutions, from grad school to
21 full-time work in game studios or
22 other work usually out of state.

23 At the 2024 -- and this
24 is where the graphics attached to

1 my testimony are
2 important particularly. At the
3 2024 Game Developers Conference,
4 GDC '24 in San Francisco, I
5 attended a presentation by Latoya
6 Peterson who made the gap between
7 funding models for games and film
8 very clear to me. The limited,
9 mostly self-funded, ways to get a
10 game made pale in comparison to the
11 many ways a film might be funded,
12 especially smaller indie-based
13 productions. And on the graphic,
14 you'll see that it covers personal
15 savings, friends and family,
16 crowdfunding, angel investors and
17 institutional investors. Only two
18 of those are really serious sources
19 of funding.

20 However, on the next
21 graphic on the next page you'll see
22 a wide variety, almost illegible
23 depending on how large the print is
24 you have, of the many ways that

1 films can be funded. With the
2 current mammoth scale of AAA
3 consolidation within game
4 development making huge publishers
5 even larger and therefore less risk
6 averse, there is an opportunity for
7 smaller studios to create more
8 inventive, more risky, more
9 personal content to appeal to a
10 wide variety of underrepresented
11 audiences. Funding for those
12 projects can reflect the same
13 variety of sources already used for
14 smaller films.

15 And this you'll see
16 listed in the report as one of the
17 many ideas that the taskforce put
18 together of looking for existing
19 art funding mechanisms and making
20 sure that they are open to and
21 receptive to game companies getting
22 that same art-based funding.

23 I think there are new
24 things that we can build from

1 scratch, but I think there are
2 existing systems that game
3 development can be included into.
4 The following -- the last few
5 slides, graphics that you'll have,
6 show a variety of directional-
7 related student-nurtured companies
8 from the EGS incubator. There is
9 vast potential that student-based
10 teams, there are a multiple of
11 them, but they are only part of the
12 vast potential in the Philadelphia
13 region for new companies to create
14 new stories for a global audience.

15 I'll touch on a couple
16 of those briefly, and though some
17 of them will be again represented
18 by their own testimony later, these
19 are some of the latest releases in
20 this one graphic showing Star
21 Hound, Jubilite, Trouble and
22 Tornado Time, Timeworks Lockjaw and
23 Bones, these are releases from EGS
24 teams just from the last year or

1 so.

2 In fact, one team,
3 Starwork Studios is not here to
4 testify today because they're at
5 Super Magfest in the Maryland area
6 in the National Harbor of Maryland
7 sharing their game with a wider
8 community through that Super
9 Magfest conference, an exhibition.
10 They're a current senior team.
11 They're actually excused from class
12 today to go and participate in that
13 conference and showcase their
14 senior project.

15 Drexel SplitSide Games,
16 who will be represented again later
17 in a moment, with their award-
18 winning title Fling to the Finish,
19 this started as a four-week
20 in-class project within the
21 classroom. They took it to EGS to
22 develop it further, and then in
23 pursuit of a publisher, continued
24 to work on it as their capstone

1 senior project. Ryan can elaborate
2 further, but their four years of
3 effort before it took them to get
4 to a publisher deal. And while
5 this continues to be developed, the
6 team has had to find alternate
7 paths to make a living, at least
8 for now. But that's a company that
9 is on the cusp of having great
10 success. Without further support,
11 it won't have that further success.

12 The last one I have to
13 show is Drexel's Pharaoh Hound
14 Studios And their award-winning
15 title Sons of Raw at the last E3
16 before that conference was shut
17 down years ago in response to
18 COVID. As events like E3 shift and
19 disappear, student teams like this
20 who won their last college game
21 competition in 2019, there is a
22 call for new methods for
23 highlighting and jumpstarting new
24 game dev companies to keep these

1 industries growing and with the
2 high potential of all the small- to
3 medium-sized indie studios that can
4 really bring innovative content out
5 into the world.

6 So in closing, I want to
7 thank again Councilmember Isaiah
8 Thomas and his Chief of Staff Dom
9 Miller and the entire PHL Gaming
10 Task Force for this opportunity,
11 for all the effort that's gone into
12 this report. And I just want to
13 close by saying that with enhanced
14 access to existing arts-related-
15 funding mechanisms, city-fostered
16 B2B connections and evolving
17 funding models closer to the
18 multifaceted indie film development
19 model, the City of Philadelphia can
20 help create a game development hub
21 that the world will pay attention
22 to. Thank you for your time.

23 MR. SANDOVAL: So as
24 mentioned, my name is Adrian

1 Sandoval. I'm the Chair of the
2 Philadelphia Chapter of the
3 International Game Developers
4 Association. I've been the chair
5 for that chapter since 2016.
6 However, I have been involved in
7 the community and part of the IGDA
8 chapter since 2007 at the earliest.
9 I'm currently an Adjunct Professor
10 of Game Design and History at
11 Drexel University. I'm also an
12 active game developer myself having
13 been working in games in the
14 Philadelphia region for nearly 20
15 years now.

16 I consider myself
17 fortunate to have been part of such
18 an active and vibrant community for
19 as long as I have, but I've been
20 frustrated in that time frame as
21 well and I want to talk briefly
22 about those frustrations today.
23 I'm frustrated because despite the
24 large number of talented artists

1 and incredible games developed in
2 our city year after year, a lot of
3 which were mentioned by Rob here
4 and also many more even before
5 that, the community of Philadelphia
6 is largely unknown in the wider
7 games industry.

8 It is sort of a running
9 joke and has been a running joke
10 for a decade or more now that any
11 time any of us go out of state, any
12 of my colleagues in the developer
13 community, we're told by other
14 people that we talk to, oh, we
15 didn't know they made games in
16 Philadelphia. I've heard that time
17 and time again over the years.

18 This lack of visibility
19 is not just a funny anecdote
20 however. I think it is a symptom
21 of a larger problem, that our
22 community has been underserved and
23 unable to gain a foothold within
24 the larger games industry despite

1 having the same level of talent and
2 expertise as the other major tech
3 and gaming hubs within the United
4 States.

5 I'm frustrated because
6 across two decades I've watched
7 promising studios with successful
8 first-time game launches having to
9 close their doors a couple of years
10 later. They're unable to find
11 adequate funding or support to keep
12 their studio afloat and healthy
13 despite initial critical and
14 financial success.

15 Rob mentioned a couple
16 of great examples. I can point to
17 a couple of others. Cipher Prime
18 Studios, Final Form Games existed
19 for maybe a year or two, some
20 getting one or two titles out the
21 door that again critical on
22 financial success but just not able
23 to get over that hump to continue
24 that success. And I think that

1 speaks to the difficulty of being
2 able to maintain a sustainable
3 place of business within our city.

4 The handful of studios
5 that are currently open struggle to
6 cover the operating costs necessary
7 to be able to sustain themselves to
8 their next contract, provided they
9 can find one, let alone be able to
10 grow their business and hire new
11 talent for bigger projects.

12 Meanwhile veteran talent cultivate
13 here, then leave for opportunities
14 elsewhere in the United States or
15 abroad.

16 I'm frustrated that
17 while many schools such as my
18 institution, which Rob spoke to
19 within our community, teach and
20 nurture hundreds of future game
21 developers or many studio
22 institutions outside of Drexel that
23 are also teaching game development
24 as well here, but the students

1 there are then forced to find
2 entry-level jobs or unpaid
3 internships on the West Coast
4 because of lack of opportunity or
5 mentorship in this area. This to
6 me is a great disservice to our
7 students. They take a great risk
8 even when they find the rare paid
9 opportunity within the larger tech
10 hubs because the cost of living is
11 so high and the future is
12 uncertain.

13 For our city the lack of
14 both new and veteran talent also
15 represents a huge cultural loss.
16 This is the next generation of
17 artists, engineers and
18 entrepreneurs. They should be able
19 to find stable work while at the
20 same time showcasing their unique
21 voice within that work.

22 Our city is known for
23 its breadth and diversity of its
24 art and its culture, and games are

1 just another vector for that as
2 well. And it's necessary that it's
3 cultivated as such. In order to do
4 that, we need to be able to
5 maintain both our current and
6 future talent.

7 People often say games
8 are our future. As a historian, I
9 think this is a misnomer. I think
10 the fact is our games are our
11 present and they have been for
12 decades. They've been a vibrant
13 culture for over 40 years now with
14 billions of players from all walks
15 of life now actively playing games.

16 As a market, I think
17 there have been challenges in
18 recent years. But one thing is
19 certain, games are not going away.
20 So my goal as the Chair of our IGDA
21 chapter has been twofold: One, to
22 give Philly a larger voice within
23 the global games industry and, two,
24 to build a better and more

1 sustainable path for current and
2 future game developers in this
3 area.

4 I believe the report and
5 many of the items that have been
6 brought up by the previous panel
7 and by Rob are the first steps
8 towards addressing these
9 longstanding issues. I'm very
10 proud to have been a part of it.
11 Thank you.

12 COUNCILMAN THOMAS:

13 Thank you.

14 A couple questions. Try
15 to be as brief as possible on your
16 responses so we can get as many
17 questions in as possible. A person
18 graduates -- first of all, thank
19 you for what you do as educators
20 and thought leaders in the city of
21 Philadelphia.

22 A person graduates from
23 Drexel with a degree. You
24 mentioned an entry-level job.

1 Based on the testimony that's been
2 provided today, anywhere from 54 to
3 60 percent of the students who
4 graduate from Drexel leave
5 Philadelphia which is terrible, but
6 you said they're going to another
7 business for entry-level jobs.

8 There are so many people who do not
9 understand the employment hierarchy
10 within the gaming community, right.

11 So if I was a educator
12 and I was going to an entry-level
13 job, I might start off as a
14 substitute teacher or a student
15 teacher. Then I become a full-time
16 teacher. Then I become an
17 administrator. Then I become a
18 principal. Then I'm trying to
19 be -- so you get the hierarchy.
20 And I'm not necessarily saying it
21 works unilaterally that way in the
22 gaming industry. But help people
23 who have no idea -- because
24 whenever I talk about gaming, the

1 first thing people think I'm
2 talking about is sports betting-
3 type gaming. Then I say, oh, no,
4 not that type of gaming, esports.
5 Oh, so the kids who play the video
6 games? No, no, it's more than just
7 a kid sitting on a Playstation or
8 Xbox playing video games.

9 So for those people who
10 only know that side of gaming, talk
11 a little bit about what those
12 entry-level jobs are, how much they
13 pay and where can you ascend to as
14 you get more entrenched in the
15 gaming profession.

16 MR. LLOYD: I'll do my
17 best to respond to that. Game
18 development is a multifaceted
19 effort. It takes a wide variety of
20 skills. And so, Drexel is a
21 generalist to specialist program.
22 We take in students and introduce
23 them to all facets of game
24 development. And so, you're

1 talking about audio writing,
2 lighting, cinematography. You're
3 talking about 3D modeling,
4 animating, creating the bones of
5 the rig, the skeleton of that
6 character that you can then animate
7 it from. There are the encounters
8 themselves. I believe Khenan
9 earlier testified he is a gameplay
10 engineer. He is someone who
11 creates the rules --

12 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: All
13 right. So this is what we need you
14 to do. Act like we're your
15 students but not the smart ones.
16 All right. Take a couple steps
17 back, slow down a little bit. I
18 understand what you're saying and
19 the two lawyers up here might
20 understand what you're saying as
21 well too. But this conversation is
22 for the greater good of the entire
23 city.

24 So someone's going to

1 watch this on YouTube in a week or
2 two and they have no idea about the
3 gaming industry, but Councilman
4 Thomas told them to watch the
5 hearing to get a better
6 understanding. So if you could
7 just slow down and just start all
8 over again so everybody can
9 understand, and also speak a little
10 more into the mic as well too.

11 MR. LLOYD: I'll do my
12 best.

13 COUNCILMAN THOMAS:
14 Thank you, Professor.

15 MR. LLOYD: When I speak
16 to high school students who come
17 and visit and during openhouse, I
18 introduce them to a couple
19 different things, and I can share
20 this with you later. But there's a
21 great designer out of Montreal
22 actually, used to work at Ubisoft,
23 that at cocktail parties would have
24 to explain what they do. And they

1 were a game designer, so they would
2 explain to the concept of a door
3 and what a game designer, how they
4 thought about a door and how you
5 would decide whether a door needed
6 to be in the game or not.

7 And then the person who
8 was doing the concept art would
9 draw different styles of door. And
10 then somebody who would be an art
11 director would pick one of those
12 styles and then a 3D modeler would
13 create that door. All of these
14 things are just taking simple
15 objects and trying to figure out
16 the many roles it takes to build
17 these things.

18 And our students often
19 enter as gamers, as consumers of
20 games. And the major pivot that we
21 help them make is turn them into
22 makers, to understand to take that
23 box apart and rebuild it
24 themselves. So the multiple roles,

1 it is like many art fields, a
2 master and an apprentice kind of
3 situation where you've got to enter
4 as an entry-level junior artist who
5 is following along with the master
6 trying to figure out how they do
7 what they do, slowly working on the
8 small safe parts from an entry-
9 level point of view until the
10 master trusts them enough to start
11 working on the heavier lifting
12 things. Those jobs are incredibly
13 hard to find.

14 This is one of the
15 valuable elements of the Drexel
16 program in that we have the co-op
17 program that allows them to go out
18 and work while their students work
19 as interns within the industry.
20 But one of our challenges within
21 that space is identifying enough of
22 those opportunities, especially
23 enough local opportunities that are
24 paid internships, to give them that

1 entry-level competency so they can
2 be more competitive for the higher-
3 level positions.

4 But entry-level jobs
5 from quality assurance where you're
6 just stress-testing the game to
7 make sure it doesn't break or how
8 it breaks, you're trying to find
9 out how it breaks, that can be 25k,
10 30k a year which is barely a
11 salary.

12 All the way up to an
13 entry-level programmer who is
14 fluent in multiple languages, they
15 potentially might be able to walk
16 into something as a junior
17 programmer, 80k, 90k, 100k and
18 above, but it's a full spectrum of
19 that entire from 20k to 100k.

20 But again, it is the
21 opportunities -- if there were more
22 local companies that had the
23 wherewithal to bring in additional
24 talent, they could be bringing in

1 our students to give them that
2 entry-level experience --

3 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: How
4 do we get more of those local
5 companies? How do we do that? How
6 do we get more local companies to
7 provide these opportunities?

8 MR. LLOYD: Well, as
9 you'll hear from other testimony
10 today and as I mentioned in my
11 testimony that it is a mix. There
12 were I recall numbers from I think
13 it was an IGDA or it might have
14 been one of the other industry
15 reports from 2014 that over 50
16 percent of independent game
17 developers made less than \$500 a
18 year on their own intellectual
19 property, but those same companies
20 earned per employee around \$64,000
21 a year by doing contract work and
22 grant-based work for outside
23 clients basically, so they weren't
24 doing their own work. That's

1 really hard to launch your own
2 intellectual property.

3 And so, making those
4 business connections so that a
5 young up-and-coming studio can
6 connect to larger studios to get
7 that contract work. I hold myself
8 up as a poster child for my
9 students in that I worked in
10 military and aerospace training and
11 simulation. I've done educational
12 projects. I've done marketing-
13 based projects. I've done themed
14 entertainment for theme parks and
15 museums.

16 The skill set that game
17 development has is a gateway to
18 pretty much any industry. And so,
19 I look at the eds, beds and meds of
20 this area and go all of those are
21 industries that need my game
22 development students to make
23 experiences for them, whether it's
24 a pharmaceutical company who needs

1 a game on their trade show booth or
2 another one that needs to have a
3 game that will teach a medical
4 student or a doctor how a medicine
5 works within the body. All of
6 these are potential spaces, but
7 making those connections takes
8 existing connections, and that's
9 where I think this Council and the
10 various constituencies that you are
11 connected with makes for a very
12 fruitful area for growth of getting
13 young student companies, like
14 you'll see represented today,
15 connected to existing large
16 companies that need this kind of
17 multimedia support. They're not
18 thinking, oh, they don't need 2K
19 basketball, they don't need those
20 big AAA things. They need some
21 specific interactive experience in
22 a game-like way to speak to their
23 constituents, to speak to their
24 audience.

1 Our students and not
2 just -- I'm here representing
3 Drexel today but I'm also part of
4 the IGDA with Adrian. With the
5 loss of the Arts was tragic, but
6 more, Temple, Haverford there are
7 multiple institutions in this area.
8 There's so many educational
9 institutions and all of them have
10 some form of digital content
11 creation, which is just a larger
12 umbrella term, to talk about game
13 development and film and animation
14 and all the things that are done
15 with the same toolkits that we use
16 in games.

17 There are a lot of
18 potential employees and contractors
19 to build this incredible
20 interactive way to educate, to
21 spread the word on whatever it is a
22 company needs to communicate. So
23 lots of possibilities there.

24 MR. SANDOVAL: To just

1 quickly add to what Rob is saying,
2 I 100 percent agree that I think
3 you mentioned that we're known as
4 eds, meds and beds, and there is
5 opportunity for game development
6 there. You had mentioned that a
7 lot of people think about people
8 playing video games at home as part
9 of the entertainment industry, but
10 we teach serious games at Drexel
11 University, games for training,
12 education and those things and
13 there are opportunities within
14 these other sectors to connect game
15 developers so that they can
16 continue to grow their company.

17 Rob also had mentioned
18 these different funding resources
19 that you see for other media that
20 are considered arts and culture
21 such as film. And other cities
22 have been investing in games as a
23 culture thinking about them in the
24 same way that we think about film

1 and media and such.

2 And some of the places
3 that Khenan had mentioned earlier,
4 some of the things that have been
5 mentioned in the report is looking
6 at these other cities where we've
7 seen success where developers are
8 able to kind of get over that hump
9 of their first game because they're
10 able to receive extra cultural
11 funding on top of again looking
12 into serious games and contract
13 work that we could also help
14 connect with, so those are all the
15 different elements I think that we
16 could see as helpful and again kind
17 of getting beyond what you had said
18 before about the perception of
19 games as beyond just entertainment
20 industry.

21 COUNCILMAN THOMAS:

22 Councilmember Young.

23 COUNCILMAN YOUNG: Thank
24 you, Councilmember. Just a point

1 of information from earlier when
2 you mentioned having conversations
3 with the Administration, the
4 Library Foundation and the Director
5 of our libraries here. I've been
6 in conversations with the
7 Administration about developing and
8 building a brand new Cecil B. Moore
9 Library. And the idea is to create
10 spaces such as these gaming spaces
11 that are 21st century spaces for
12 our children, for the community to
13 have.

14 And so, whatever support
15 that you all need in dealing with
16 the library system, I'll be willing
17 to lend that support because our
18 libraries are the perfect spaces to
19 have these types of studios, these
20 types of spaces, not for children
21 to just play video games, right,
22 but also to learn how to develop
23 these games as well so I'm very
24 supportive of that idea. We need

1 to build these new facilities in
2 our city to keep up with some of
3 the other cities that are taking
4 this industry from us.

5 But I do have a
6 question. I'm just looking for
7 some data I guess on the commercial
8 success of some games like what's
9 the percentage of those games that
10 are being developed that actually
11 make it to market? And I'm looking
12 for that information because I'm
13 trying to figure out how as a city
14 do we invest in this space, right?
15 Do we invest in individual
16 entrepreneurs, right, or do we
17 invest in creating the spaces or do
18 we invest in the tax credits? How
19 do we invest in this particular
20 space? What's the best model, the
21 best way?

22 MR. LLOYD: All of the
23 above, too much to ask. So I think
24 there are multiple avenues. One,

1 if I may, quick aside on the
2 library concept. I often talk to
3 prospective students that math is a
4 core element, it's a gateway
5 element into game development in
6 whatever facet. And game
7 development like you see in youth
8 programs around robotics, the Lego
9 First competitions that are often
10 happening in library spaces, games
11 are also a gateway into STEM fields
12 across the board because of the
13 variety or steam rather with the
14 art injected into that gateway,
15 into that space.

16 In terms of support, I
17 will defer in some detail to the
18 further testimony from the studio
19 members and the companies that will
20 follow later, but I think it is a
21 combination of investing in those
22 business-to-business connections to
23 get young studios more contract
24 work to help them keep the lights

1 on as they build their studio
2 capacity and stability, which gives
3 them freedom to invest more into
4 their own intellectual property.
5 But then also there is, as Adrian
6 talked about, the reason we've
7 built as the IGDA a campaign called
8 Phillymakesgames as a hashtag,
9 there's for the YouTube crowd,
10 #Phillymakesgames, is an awareness
11 issue.

12 And so, part of that
13 investment is when I go to GDC, the
14 Game Developers Conference in San
15 Francisco which is the premier
16 networking event of the industry,
17 even internationally not just
18 nationally, and I go into the
19 pavilion where all the state- and
20 country-based pavilions are, I can
21 look at a million dollar booth or
22 whatever it cost, I'm sure it was
23 quite expensive from New York state
24 which has done a lot of investing

1 into the game space as already been
2 mentioned by Nicodemus and others,
3 all the way to Canada, the entire
4 country of Canada is represented by
5 a booth that probably cost them
6 \$15,000, but we can't be there in
7 Philadelphia because nobody here
8 individually has that \$15,000, so
9 there is a larger awareness so that
10 people know that Philly makes games
11 and that we're making a lot already
12 and we can make even more.

13 I think it's a
14 multifaceted approach of awareness
15 as well as support of those young
16 companies that will build a
17 critical mass of successful revenue
18 generation and jobs here in the
19 city.

20 Adrian.

21 MR. SANDOVAL: I mean, I
22 100 percent agree. I will say
23 outside of Drexel as the Chair for
24 the IGDA representing game

1 developers, my interest is to see
2 that like future game developers
3 have a job to go to, that's my
4 number one concern, and I really do
5 believe that we've had companies
6 before start who have critical
7 success, who have financial
8 success, who as I mentioned before
9 just haven't been able to get over
10 that hump.

11 I know that the people
12 who will follow us, the developers
13 and CEOs of some of those
14 companies, will be able to speak to
15 some of that difficulty, and I 100
16 percent believe that investment in
17 them and growing something here
18 organically is the path. That is
19 the direction that I see going
20 forward.

21 COUNCILMAN YOUNG: Thank
22 you.

23 MR. SANDOVAL: Sure.

24 COUNCILMAN YOUNG: It

1 was mentioned that some of the
2 barriers I guess to the industry is
3 publishers, investors, marketing.
4 And this is a market, like the
5 gaming industry is a market just
6 like any other industry, right. So
7 you want to have -- and this is
8 America so capitalism is it, right.
9 So what do you as a -- how can you
10 as a smaller -- I guess I don't
11 want to call them gamers, but what
12 do you call someone in this
13 industry, right, starting up in
14 this industry? How do you stand
15 out? How do you get yourself into
16 a particular space that these
17 investors, these publishers, these
18 folks who put games to market can
19 see your work and recognize your
20 work outside of going to those
21 conferences? What other things are
22 available?

23 MR. SANDOVAL: Sure. I
24 mean, number one has always been

1 social media. Social media has
2 been the biggest thing for small
3 companies to try and carve a niche
4 out for themselves. And in the
5 independent space when you're
6 starting a studio yourself, the
7 best way to stand out has become
8 high quality art, a very good
9 trailer. The difficulty there
10 though, however, is that you kind
11 of need that initial funding to be
12 able to even develop a proof of
13 concept.

14 So this is why again a
15 lot of cities and countries have
16 started small funding boosts, even
17 just like an initial package of
18 money to a new company to allow
19 them to be able to have that
20 investment to create something that
21 they can then show to potential
22 investors developers to be able to
23 create that first thing.

24 I also know that some

1 countries such as I believe it was
2 New Zealand started where a
3 returning company after they've
4 made their first game might
5 actually be able to have an
6 ascending level of funding to keep
7 that studio going to get to the
8 next contract.

9 COUNCILMAN YOUNG: And
10 last question: Does your
11 organization help create some kind
12 of pitch deck for some of these
13 developers to give to or send to
14 some of these larger institutional
15 investors, other investors to say,
16 hey, this is what we can do, this
17 is what I can do, this is what I've
18 done? Is that infrastructure in
19 place?

20 MR. SANDOVAL: So the
21 IGDA has some resources like that
22 on their website for the national
23 organization. I can say that the
24 primary goal of the IGDA, which is

1 nationally based, but has chapters
2 all around the world to support
3 depending on what the individual
4 needs of that community are, right
5 so my coming here to testify is an
6 example of that sort of advocacy.

7 Primarily those kinds of
8 resources have traditionally been a
9 community effort, so there have
10 been -- like I know certain
11 publishers like Raw Fury and Humble
12 Games actually share their pitch
13 decks online for people to see, and
14 then organizations like ours or the
15 Philly Game Mechanics will then
16 take those and then share them with
17 their smaller community. So it's
18 not necessarily the purview of our
19 organization. However, our
20 organization does try to connect
21 those resources to the community at
22 large.

23 MR. LLOYD: And our
24 students are also taught how to

1 build those decks because in our
2 studio-based courses where they're
3 building larger projects, they're
4 pitching those projects all the
5 time. And part of that is having
6 an awareness of the market aspect
7 and pitching to an investor or
8 other publisher, so that's part of
9 the education aspect.

10 COUNCILMAN YOUNG:

11 Great. Thank you, Councilmember.

12 COUNCILMAN THOMAS:

13 Thank you, Councilman.

14 As we close out this
15 panel, just a couple things real
16 quick. I'm wondering is there
17 anything from the report that you
18 didn't get a chance to highlight
19 that you feel like should be put on
20 the record and talk to us a little
21 bit about local tax cuts and what
22 that would do for the industry as
23 well too?

24 MR. LLOYD: One of the

1 things that I'm really excited
2 about with this report is the wide
3 variety of options to work and grow
4 the community. Part of actually
5 what I wanted to add into an
6 earlier question was how do you get
7 recognized, how do you get found.
8 And some of that is through, you
9 know, we're representing the makers
10 of games, but part of this push
11 includes the playing of games
12 through esports and the supporting
13 of that --

14 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: You
15 said part of the push is what?

16 MR. LLOYD: Part of the
17 report discusses esports and the
18 playing of games. And so, part of
19 what we've done at Drexel, like I
20 mentioned earlier, Rivals of
21 Aether, which is an esports game
22 built by one of our alum, we've had
23 esports events using that title.

24 And one of the things

1 that I would love to see and is, I
2 think, part of the esports portion
3 of this is having local esports-
4 related games being played at these
5 events and not just top tier AAA
6 games made elsewhere but having
7 local games part of that esports
8 initiative.

9 I think the element of
10 tax credits and the B2B connections
11 and the existing arts funding that
12 is available being open to game
13 projects are all important elements
14 of making it fiscally possible to
15 have a young company survive past
16 that critical first couple of years
17 until they can really get on solid
18 footing and persist. Some of those
19 things are a short run but can help
20 them get going, so to me it's about
21 building that awareness and
22 building those connections between
23 all the large industry that's
24 already here. Comcast Labs is part

1 of Comcast, the larger corporation,
2 and we have alum there working on a
3 variety of non-game entertainment
4 projects --

5 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Let
6 me cut you off right there.

7 MR. LLOYD: Sure.

8 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: So
9 with that concept in mind, my team
10 and I were thinking about UCity
11 Science Center, right, which is an
12 example of a KOZ zone and a
13 university and government
14 partnership focused on basic
15 research as well as job creation,
16 clearly that's mostly for life
17 sciences. What would it look like
18 or could we expand that or have a
19 similar type of portfolio as a
20 partnership with Drexel looking at
21 the city, a KOZ zone, local
22 university, job creation and all
23 parties involved providing support
24 and this possibly being a pilot for

1 a space that can put us in a
2 position to help grow the industry?
3 It's a random idea, thoughts.

4 MR. LLOYD: I'm
5 intrigued. I can't suddenly
6 elevate myself to the position of
7 President of Drexel University --

8 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: And
9 I can't be a District Councilperson
10 to provide a KOZ zone, so we're
11 definitely speaking in a
12 hypothetical here.

13 MR. LLOYD: But I love
14 the idea. I love the idea.
15 Actually I'm on a -- co-op is a
16 huge part of what Drexel University
17 represents and offers an
18 educational experience and I've
19 been part of a co-op committee
20 within Westphal College, the art
21 and design college within Drexel,
22 working specifically to identify
23 other ways and partnerships that we
24 can build more paid internship

1 possibilities and exactly the kind
2 of partnership that you're talking
3 about to me would feed right into
4 that conversation and I would be
5 very excited to continue that
6 conversation about that. I think
7 that'd be very interesting.

8 COUNCILMAN THOMAS:

9 Amazing. All right. So I'm going
10 to let you go. This is what I'll
11 ask you to say as your goodbye. 54
12 to 60 percent of students who are
13 within the department eventually
14 leave when they get their degree.
15 Talk to us in comparison to other
16 majors, right. So if I didn't know
17 any better, I would say, oh, yeah,
18 well, you know, everybody leaves,
19 right. 54 to 60 percent of people
20 who get their law degree from
21 Temple leave the city, 54 to 60
22 percent of the people who get their
23 Bachelor's Degree in Education go
24 teach somewhere else.

1 So how alarming are
2 those numbers? Are they really
3 bad? Are they the norm? Should we
4 be worried or is it to be expected?
5 And that'll be my last question,
6 and we can move on to the next
7 panel after this.

8 MR. LLOYD: I thank you
9 for the opportunity overall and for
10 that last question. What those
11 numbers don't represent is of the
12 40 percent who stay in the city, of
13 the roughly 50 percent that stay in
14 the state overall, a much smaller
15 fraction of them stay in game
16 development. And so, those numbers
17 don't represent who stays in game
18 development in the city. That just
19 means who stays and finds some way
20 to pay their bills.

21 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: But
22 most of them won't be in gaming?

23 MR. LLOYD: And I come
24 from a generation where everybody

1 around me, very few of them went on
2 to actually do what they studied to
3 do. I sit before you a Master's of
4 Fine Arts of Metalsmithing from
5 Tyler School of Art, but I found my
6 way into digital storytelling and
7 making themed entertainment and
8 that's how I run a game department
9 now.

10 It breaks my heart to
11 see so many of my students with
12 incredible talent -- what we
13 haven't even addressed today is the
14 challenge that our international
15 students, which is maybe only 10
16 percent of my program specifically,
17 but sometimes they're excellent
18 talent and their visa challenges
19 where they not only have to find a
20 job but they have to find one fast
21 before their time runs out on their
22 visa to watch incredible talent
23 have to not only leave the city,
24 leave the state but leave the

1 country that we trained, that we
2 helped get to that high level of
3 excellence, they have to go. They
4 have to find some other way to make
5 a living and that spreads out to
6 too many of my students.

7 They want to be in the
8 area. They have family ties. They
9 have financial cost of living.
10 They like the area. They want to
11 be here. They can't afford to stay
12 and stay in the industry so they
13 have to find a different path, and
14 that number is way less than 40
15 percent.

16 COUNCILMAN THOMAS:

17 Thank you.

18 MR. LLOYD: Thank you
19 for the time.

20 COUNCILMAN THOMAS:

21 Thank you both. Thank you for your
22 presence. Thank you for sharing
23 your expertise. Thank you for all
24 you do to make our city great, and

1 we want to continue to work
2 together and explore what we can do
3 to expand the program and of course
4 provide opportunity for the
5 students who go to the program so
6 we can put them in a position where
7 they can stay here and much longer,
8 your numbers, and of course work in
9 the industry, so thank you.

10 MR. LLOYD: Thank you so
11 much for the opportunity.

12 MR. SANDOVAL: Thank
13 you. Thank you for your time.

14 COUNCILMAN THOMAS:
15 Thank you both.

16 Mr. Maynard, will you
17 please call the final panel for
18 today's hearing. I want to -- go
19 ahead, Mr. Maynard.

20 THE CLERK: Yes, of
21 course, Mr. Chair.

22 For our final panel,
23 we'll hear from Ishmael Shaheed
24 from Nerd Street Localhost and Nick

1 Madonna, the founder of PHL

2 Collective. Please --

3 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: I

4 know that we have a number of

5 people -- go ahead, Mr. Maynard.

6 I'm sorry.

7 THE CLERK: Please,

8 Mr. Chair.

9 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: I

10 know we have a number of people who

11 signed up for public comment. How

12 many is there, Mr. Maynard?

13 THE CLERK: There are

14 three names on public comment,

15 Mr. Chair.

16 COUNCILMAN THOMAS:

17 Okay. So we're going to ask the

18 people on the public comment side

19 to try to limit your remarks to

20 about three minutes per person if

21 that's okay, so you can kind of

22 prepare yourself for your remarks

23 to be around three minutes per

24 person.

1 And this panel, please
2 state your name for the record and
3 you can begin your testimony.

4 We'll allow you both to testify
5 consecutively one after the other.

6 MR. HALL: Absolutely.
7 First of all, good afternoon,
8 Councilman Thomas and members of
9 the Council. My name is Ishmael
10 Hall. I'm the head of venues of
11 for Nerdstreet, which currently has
12 me supporting other great leaders.
13 I'm in the Denver area and also the
14 Philadelphia area and the Glassboro
15 area for Rowan University.

16 Before I begin, you made
17 a point about saying folks are
18 going to be watching this on
19 YouTube so let me explain what
20 Localhost is. So Localhost is an
21 esports land center. We do
22 tournaments, events, birthday
23 parties. We also work with third
24 parties to host events that they

1 may want to do.

2 A lot of these great
3 people behind me that create their
4 own games, they actually were able
5 to use this facility during PHL
6 Gaming to show off their games that
7 they created to different people in
8 the community and also to inspire
9 the youth to go on that same route
10 as well too.

11 Our local's venues that
12 I previously mentioned all offer
13 unique experiences tailored to the
14 communities in Denver. We see a
15 strong focus on high level
16 competitive esports in which we're
17 able to support groups striving for
18 top performance while our
19 Philadelphia and Rowan properties
20 focus on building diverse
21 participation in skills include
22 broadcasting, streaming, event
23 management and community engagement
24 and a lot of the other things that

1 folks were talking about today, my
2 fellow peers were talking about
3 earlier today.

4 For our first university
5 property in Glassboro provides a
6 crucial dedicated space where
7 students can practice and hone
8 their skills without worries of
9 equipment, limitations making it an
10 attractive option for high school
11 students to have a place to go to
12 after they graduate to go for a
13 degree for esports. Our
14 Philadelphia property located at
15 401 North Broad Street near Temple,
16 Drexel and other local high
17 schools, tech hubs and the
18 Philadelphia Library continues to
19 be dedicated to offering students
20 in the community opportunities
21 beyond competition.

22 Across all three venues
23 we focus on creating positive,
24 practical and career-focused

1 experience and the technical and
2 communication side of gaming rather
3 whether through competition or
4 community involvement. The data
5 that I'm about to speak of
6 highlights the powerful impact of
7 esports on students' academic
8 performances. Participations in
9 esports program leads to improved
10 attendance of 10 percent and also
11 higher GPA of +1.7 percent.

12 Furthermore, 60 percent
13 of coaches report better grades in
14 attendance among players while 30
15 percent of students express a
16 greater communication --
17 commitment, my apologies, to
18 academics. Esports also
19 significantly boost school's
20 engagement with 45 percent of play
21 versus students feeling more
22 excited about going to school and
23 80 percent of high school esports
24 players being new to

1 extracurricular activities.

2 Globally the esports
3 industry is thriving, projected to
4 exceed 1.6 billion in value in
5 2024, and the U.S. esports
6 generated 243 million in revenue in
7 2021 contributing significant to
8 local economies. Major esports
9 events have brought substantial
10 economic impacts to host cities
11 ranging from 100 to 280 million.
12 Cities like Jacksonville, Chicago,
13 Nashville and Atlanta which
14 consider themselves the capital of
15 esports.

16 Having seen the tangible
17 benefits from the growing industry,
18 this is why we're all here today
19 because we know that Philadelphia
20 can also compete and also be a part
21 of that winning success for esports
22 and also gaming. Employment within
23 the esports has grown massively
24 with an 87 percent annual increase

1 since 2019 and a jump from 39,000
2 to around 41,000 jobs between 2020
3 and 2021.

4 Today over 700,000
5 people in the U.S. are employed by
6 esports. Venue sectors surpassing
7 employment levels in many other
8 industries. Roles range from
9 software engineering, game
10 development and marketing, event
11 coordinating and content creation
12 and so many other different
13 positions that my previous
14 colleagues just spoke about.
15 Offers competitive salaries, start
16 from anywhere between 30,000 to
17 40,000 for entry level positions
18 all the way to six-figure incomes
19 for specialized roles. Beyond
20 economic growth, esports fosters
21 essential skills like teamwork,
22 communication, critical thinking
23 and leadership, making it an
24 important part for the modern

1 economy.

2 I know a lot of folks
3 spoke about different venues and
4 what's needed in the Philly area.
5 Just to kind of speak about
6 Localhost, Localhost venues empower
7 communities by providing high-
8 quality PC and internet access
9 fostering academic, social and
10 career development. Nerd Street
11 with the support of Philadelphia
12 partnered with schools to offer
13 esports experience rather than be
14 commentary production, marketing
15 enhancing critical communication
16 skills. Data on esports positive
17 impact on student performance
18 supports align Localhost programs
19 with academic support, creating a
20 more comprehensive system.

21 Esports is a valuable
22 education and career development
23 tool, and I'll repeat that again.
24 Esports is a valuable education and

1 career development tool benefiting
2 students and the community
3 together. We can nurture the next
4 generation of talent and make a
5 real difference in the city of
6 Philadelphia. So that's all I
7 have.

8 MR. MADONNA: Hi. Good
9 afternoon. My name is Nick Madonna
10 and I'm the founder of PHL
11 Collective and a consulting member
12 of the PHL Gaming and Tech Task
13 Force. Today I'm speaking to
14 propose how we can grow a thriving
15 video game industry in our city by
16 investing in dedicated funding for
17 local developers and fostering
18 programs to attract and retain
19 creative talent. We can unlock
20 Philadelphia's potential as a
21 vibrant job-creating sector
22 centered around video games.

23 With the city's support,
24 we can transform challenges into

1 opportunities and build an industry
2 that benefits everyone. Before I
3 get started, I'd like to thank
4 Councilman Thomas for hosting this
5 hearing. I'd also like to thank
6 the other members of the Council
7 who are present. Your time and
8 consideration regarding these
9 matters are very much appreciated.

10 Since 2013 I've been
11 running PHL Collective, an award-
12 winning game development studio
13 founded and headquartered here in
14 Philadelphia with the core goals of
15 making great games and growing
16 local talent. Out of nearly 20
17 years in the industry, I've been
18 running PHL Collective for 12.
19 Before I can tell you more about
20 PHL Collective, I should quickly
21 tell you how I got here.

22 It's a story about
23 leaving Philadelphia in order to
24 come back, something that's not

1 uncommon for local graduates who
2 possess creative and technical
3 skills. I'm a fourth generation
4 and current resident of South
5 Philadelphia. I was born here. I
6 was raised in the suburbs and
7 attended Philadelphia University as
8 an industrial design major.

9 Video games were always
10 my passion and Philadelphia
11 University wasn't meeting my needs,
12 so I left and attended Full Sail
13 University in Florida. I received
14 my degree and returned to
15 Philadelphia only to find no local
16 job opportunities. I found an
17 entry-level opportunity in
18 Los Angeles, packed my bags, moved
19 and I grew my -- I'm sorry. I grew
20 my career there working for large
21 companies like Square Enix and
22 Vivendi Universal on renowned AAA
23 titles like Final Fantasy and Fear.

24 I continued to grow my

1 career with Saber Interactive,
2 which was headquartered in New
3 Jersey and St. Petersburg, Russia.
4 With Saber I lived and worked
5 internationally shipping huge
6 titles like Halo, Inversion, World
7 War Z and even Shaq Fu.

8 Once I'd built enough
9 experience, contacts, pennies and
10 know-how, I bet on myself and
11 returned to Philadelphia to start
12 PHL Collective, a studio meant to
13 be part of a small and growing
14 local scene, a studio that would
15 also help solve problems I ran into
16 while looking for a job coming out
17 of college. I knew there would be
18 more people like me who didn't want
19 to leave the city and were being
20 forced to due to lack of local job
21 opportunities.

22 PHL Collective was
23 founded with a team of six highly-
24 skilled local graduates from Drexel

1 and University of the Arts who
2 wanted to stay in Philadelphia and
3 grow something. We were supported
4 and mentored by Cypher Prime,
5 Flyclops and Final Form Games.
6 These Studios were founding members
7 of Philly Dev Night, the precursor
8 to Game Mechanics and were the
9 first wave of indie studios here in
10 the city.

11 Since its founding, PHL
12 Collective has continued to grow
13 its headcount to nearly 30 and has
14 continuously signed major
15 publishing deals to release titles
16 based on world-renowned IPs like
17 Star Wars, Justice League, Barbie
18 and SpongeBob SquarePants. Today
19 if you walk into any Target,
20 Walmart or GameStop here in the
21 U.S. or a similar store
22 internationally, you will find a
23 game created here in Philadelphia
24 by PHL Collective on the shelf.

1 These are some of the games here in
2 front of me.

3 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Do
4 you hear that, Ms. Carter? We're
5 trying, right. And for those who
6 don't know, I think it's really
7 important to understand that -- and
8 I keep referencing Ms. Carter just
9 because the Mayor isn't here but
10 Ms. Carter and the Commerce
11 Department has been a great ally as
12 it relates to the work that we're
13 doing, our advocacy efforts and
14 having coordinated initiatives to
15 be able to fight for this.

16 So again, thank you for
17 staying as well too, Ms. Carter.
18 Your representation in the Commerce
19 Department listening to everyone's
20 testimony is greatly appreciated.

21 Go ahead. Please
22 continue. I apologize.

23 MR. MADONNA: No, no
24 problem. Video games get us

1 excited, right. So all the games
2 that you have in hand are games
3 that you could find on the shelf in
4 any of the stores that I mentioned.
5 So all this is only possible with
6 our local talent and the mentorship
7 we received at Philly Dev Night.
8 PHL Collective is leading the
9 second wave of studios in
10 Philadelphia and it's imperative
11 that we work together to build a
12 support framework for current
13 studios and future ones that will
14 call the city home.

15 Today I urge City
16 Council to take decisive steps to
17 position Philadelphia as a leading
18 hub for the video game industry.
19 The following four targeted
20 solutions are crucial for
21 supporting current businesses while
22 laying the foundation for future
23 growth: First, establishing job
24 creation and job retention tax

1 credits will incentivize studios to
2 hire and retain local talent,
3 addressing one of the most
4 significant challenges for local
5 developers.

6 COUNCILMAN THOMAS:

7 Repeat that first recommendation
8 again please.

9 MR. MADONNA:

10 Establishing job creation and job
11 retention tax credits will
12 incentivize studios to hire and
13 retain local talent, addressing one
14 of the most significant challenges
15 for local developers. Building
16 stable teams in a competitive
17 industry by reducing the financial
18 burden of employment, these tax
19 credits can help studios expand,
20 create well-paying jobs, keep
21 skilled professionals in
22 Philadelphia and attract more game
23 studios to set up offices in the
24 city.

1 Second, introducing a
2 Philadelphia video game production
3 tax credit will attract more
4 developers, publishers and service
5 providers here to the city.
6 Requiring that at least 30 percent
7 of production expenses be spent
8 locally ensures that these
9 investments directly benefit
10 Philadelphia's economy. Offering
11 an additional 10 percent credit for
12 productions that feature the
13 Phillymakesgames hashtag or logo in
14 their credits not only incentivizes
15 local pride but promotes
16 Philadelphia on a global scale
17 attracting more business and eyes
18 on the city and what is being built
19 here.

20 Third, abolishing the
21 Philadelphia business income and
22 receipts tax will remove a
23 significant financial obstacle for
24 small businesses, particularly

1 those in the creative fields like
2 video game development.
3 Eliminating it will create a more
4 equitable and business-friendly
5 environment, allowing developers to
6 reinvest in their companies and
7 their projects.

8 And finally, launching a
9 creative grant program for game
10 developers is essential to nurture
11 innovation in this industry. For
12 many independent developers here,
13 access to funding is the difference
14 between success and failure. By
15 providing direct support for the
16 creation and release of video
17 games, this city can empower a new
18 generation of creators who will
19 shape the future of gaming while
20 further cementing Philadelphia is a
21 hub for artistic and technological
22 innovation.

23 These solutions are not
24 just investments in the video game

1 industry. They are investments in
2 Philadelphia's economic future. By
3 fostering a thriving creative
4 sector, the city will attract
5 talent, generate jobs and build the
6 reputation as a forward-thinking
7 hub for digital media and
8 technology. Council, thank you
9 again for your time and
10 consideration. I look forward to
11 working together to build a
12 stronger future for Philadelphia's
13 video game industry.

14 COUNCILMAN THOMAS:
15 Thank you. Thank you both for your
16 testimony.

17 Just a couple quick
18 things. Thinking about your space,
19 how many people do you have that
20 come through your doors in a year?

21 MR. HALL: So it's
22 actually a -- thank you for asking
23 that question by the way. So for
24 our facility, it's a unique space

1 because when we do our own events,
2 we actually are able to contribute
3 to bringing other folks in from
4 different areas of the world.

5 So I would say a few
6 years ago we had a CSO event where
7 we had folks from Australia, we had
8 folks from just different -- like
9 Germany, I believe that was another
10 place that someone else came in
11 that they're able to come in to
12 compete. Now, obviously those are
13 one-offs. We need the funding in
14 order to market that. Our
15 marketing team can only do so much
16 and only reach so far, but we're
17 able to reach out through community
18 members by reaching out to one
19 another.

20 But on the daily, I
21 would say for the Philadelphia
22 property we have schools -- we have
23 a free student hour from 3:00 to
24 5:00 where students can come in

1 after school, have a safe place to
2 kind of meet up with their friends,
3 hang out, play games, get to know
4 one another. From there that's
5 probably like around 40 kids that
6 come in during that time period.
7 Any other given day on the weekend
8 it can be anywhere from 60 to 80.
9 If we have a tournament, it's
10 anywhere from the hundreds to the
11 150s.

12 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: So
13 thousands of people in a year take
14 advantage of your space?

15 MR. HALL: Yes.

16 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Is
17 it a membership fee?

18 MR. HALL: So it's not a
19 membership. Memberships are
20 totally free to make. It's just
21 going to be an hourly purchase. So
22 for 1 hour play is \$8 and then
23 afterwards 4 hours is I believe 20
24 and then 12 hours is 48. The hours

1 don't expire. They're able to stay
2 on their account and come back any
3 time that they choose to come in.
4 We also have day passes and we also
5 have worked with universities like
6 Temple and also Drexel to provide
7 day passes for the day where
8 they're able to come in.

9 COUNCILMAN THOMAS:

10 Thank you. You have the ear of the
11 Mayor. You have the ear of City
12 Council right now. You listed a
13 couple recommendations. What is
14 the most important one or two? All
15 of them are important, and clearly
16 we need to exercise and use our
17 platforms to try our best to
18 implement as many as possible.

19 This is my last
20 question. What do you think is the
21 simplest and easiest to implement?
22 What do you think is the most
23 important to implement?

24 MR. MADONNA: The

1 simplest and easiest solution to
2 implement is something similar to
3 Rob's testimony earlier, which is
4 leveraging existing mechanics that
5 are in place when it comes to tax
6 credits, specifically the retention
7 and creation credits. I do know
8 that they exist for similar
9 industries here in the city and I
10 know that the ceiling is very low
11 on what's offered, but I think if
12 we were able to leverage those
13 existing pipelines, that would be
14 the easiest way to move forward on
15 an actionable item that would help
16 developers.

17 The single most
18 important one would be the creative
19 grant program. If we have a fund
20 where developers are able to fund
21 their games from creation to
22 actually bringing it to market
23 without having to rely on a third-
24 party publisher, that incentivizes

1 and empowers them to generate
2 revenue on their own without being
3 beholden to a third-party partner
4 that takes a large portion of the
5 pie.

6 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: 30
7 seconds. What would that look like
8 for government to do that?

9 MR. MADONNA: We could
10 look at similar states like Georgia
11 or Louisiana or even Montreal where
12 there is a fund that developers can
13 apply to, get credits --

14 COUNCILMAN THOMAS:
15 Government fund.

16 MR. MADONNA: Government
17 fund, yes.

18 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: And
19 you would get the money directly
20 from government?

21 MR. MADONNA: Correct.

22 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: How
23 much are the grants in other cities
24 where this already exists?

1 MR. MADONNA: So in
2 Montreal you can get a credit
3 anywhere from \$150,000 to \$750,000.

4 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: So
5 you're getting a credit?

6 MR. MADONNA: I'm sorry.
7 No, this is grant money.

8 COUNCILMAN THOMAS:
9 Right. You said anywhere from how
10 much to how much?

11 MR. MADONNA: 150,000 to
12 750,000.

13 COUNCILMAN THOMAS:
14 Okay. Good to know. What if we
15 were to do it on a smaller level?

16 MR. MADONNA: On a
17 smaller level it would help,
18 especially as games need
19 specifically investment to get them
20 over the line and get to market.
21 Any amount of money that could be
22 offered to a developer to help them
23 release their game on Steam or Xbox
24 to put a little bit money into

1 marketing. As low as 50,000, as
2 low as 25,000, that will do worlds
3 of wonder for a developer looking
4 to release their game.

5 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: So
6 if the City created a pilot program
7 that gave away \$1.5 million to
8 developers in the city to further
9 their vision.

10 MR. MADONNA: That would
11 change things immensely for
12 developers here.

13 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: \$1.5
14 million, all right. I'm looking
15 around, you know, seeing who hears
16 this.

17 MR. MADONNA: Yeah.
18 Those are numbers that help with
19 our initiative that build from the
20 ground up. Those numbers would
21 have to grow in the future.

22 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: My
23 only thing would be this, it's very
24 difficult to give a grant to a

1 startup. How do we do this in a
2 way that's realistic because for us
3 government can't fund an idea,
4 right. You kind of got to be a
5 proven -- I'm brainstorming.

6 MR. MADONNA: But
7 government can fund an initiative,
8 correct?

9 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Yes.

10 MR. MADONNA: And this
11 initiative that the PHL Task Force
12 is all about is furthering our
13 economic goals and furthering an
14 industry here in the city. So if
15 you're a video game startup and you
16 have a product that you want to
17 build and you have a plan for how
18 to get it to market, that should be
19 enough to get a little bit of money
20 to help --

21 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: And
22 it's enough in other cities?

23 MR. MADONNA: What was
24 that?

1 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: It's
2 enough in other cities?

3 MR. MADONNA: Yes.

4 COUNCILMAN THOMAS:
5 Thank you. I'm getting multiple
6 yeses.

7 All right. I want to
8 say thank you to this panel for
9 your testimony. Thank you for your
10 patience. I know there are a
11 number of people who want to
12 provide public comments so I don't
13 want to hold them up any longer,
14 but we appreciate your expertise.
15 We appreciate you being in
16 Philadelphia. We appreciate you
17 staying here. And hopefully, the
18 next time we come back in these
19 chambers we're doing a victory lap
20 around what we've been able to
21 accomplish and what we still need
22 to do because we know we're not
23 going to get everything done in the
24 first round. But based on your

1 expertise and your advocacy,
2 hopefully we can see some things
3 change that benefits the industry,
4 especially with 2026 on the
5 horizon, because we got to get
6 gaming right for 2026.

7 I want the PHL Gaming
8 Festival to be big and amazing, but
9 I know that there are so many other
10 initiatives and events and creative
11 ideas that are out there. I want
12 us to maximize 2026, so thank you.

13 Please, last comment and
14 then we can move on to public
15 comment.

16 MR. HALL: Absolutely.
17 I just want to add one more comment
18 for Localhost and Nerd Street.
19 We're able to also meet you at
20 wherever you are maybe too. So if
21 anyone ever needs support with
22 equipment, we have the technology
23 and we also have the infrastructure
24 to actually help you build it out.

1 So thank you for your time.

2 COUNCILMAN THOMAS:

3 Thank you.

4 MR. MADONNA: Yes, thank
5 you.

6 COUNCILMAN THOMAS:

7 Thank you.

8 Mr. Maynard, if you
9 could call up our witnesses for
10 public comment.

11 Just for those of you
12 who know, during public comment is
13 not normally a question-and-answer
14 thing. So you can come up, provide
15 your name, provide your comment and
16 it will be added to the record and
17 then we'll be getting ready to wrap
18 up.

19 Are you guys okay? I
20 know we're going a little late. I
21 know you had one this morning?

22 COURT REPORTER:

23 (Gestured).

24 COUNCILMAN THOMAS:

1 Amazing.

2 Dave, Mr. Maynard.

3 THE CLERK: The

4 Committee will now hear public

5 comment from Tom, Cory and Hunter.

6 In that order, gentlemen will you

7 please come to the table.

8 (Witnesses approached

9 Witness table.)

10 COUNCILMAN THOMAS:

11 Please state your name for the

12 record. You may begin with your

13 testimony. Please try to keep your

14 testimony to three minutes, and we

15 will allow you three to have the

16 final remarks in today's hearing.

17 Thank you.

18 MR. SHARPE: Great.

19 Thank you. My name is Tom Sharpe.

20 You want to go ahead.

21 MR. ARNOLD: Oh. I'm

22 Corey Arnold.

23 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: No,

24 no, no. Tom, it's public comment.

1 So you go, you provide yours and
2 then we'll go to the next person.

3 MR. SHARPE: All right.

4 I'm excited to talk to you today
5 because I think my testimony today
6 is going to build off the ideas we
7 had just actually mentioned. So my
8 name is Tom Sharpe. I'm the
9 Director of Gossamer Games. And a
10 little over 10 years ago I was one
11 of the first teams to come out of
12 Drexel University's Entrepreneurial
13 Game Studio. And from exhibiting
14 at the Smithsonian American Art
15 Museum to creating and teaching one
16 of Temple University's very first
17 video game design courses, this
18 past decade has been unimaginably,
19 creatively and professionally
20 fulfilling for me. But sadly
21 without swift and meaningful
22 support from the city, I may soon
23 be forced to leave my home here in
24 search of greater production

1 opportunities.

2 Talented Philly

3 developers like myself are starving
4 for opportunities, as we've talked
5 about today. So I want to explore
6 making concrete solutions for that.
7 We've talked a lot today about
8 making games in Philadelphia, but I
9 also propose we explore making
10 games about Philadelphia. Let's
11 find ways to connect game
12 developers with cultural
13 organizations, historical sites,
14 event planners and the tourism
15 department to create games about
16 our great city and all the amazing
17 people and places we have here.

18 We know that 2026 is
19 going to be a pivotal year for the
20 city so what better way to show the
21 world that Philadelphia is leading
22 the country in technology
23 innovation than to promote the city
24 using the most cutting-edge

1 entertainment available which is
2 video games. Let's invite the
3 world to play Philadelphia in 2026.

4 Imagine embarking on a
5 national treasure-style adventure
6 through Independence Hall in Old
7 City or watching the big Fourth of
8 July celebration directly inside of
9 Fortnite. All of those are
10 possible and we have the talent
11 here today to do that.

12 It's no secret that the
13 vast majority of media today
14 largely ignores our city. And in
15 video games you can count the
16 number of times Philadelphia has
17 been prominently featured as a
18 setting on one hand. Not only
19 would Philadelphians go wild over
20 seeing our home city and culture
21 finally represented in the media,
22 many brands and companies have
23 proven that there's a tremendous
24 opportunity for viral marketing

1 using video games as the method.

2 Giving Philly developers
3 the opportunity to tell Philly
4 stories not only provides the much-
5 needed funding, exposure and
6 professional opportunities that we
7 developers need and that we've
8 talked extensively about today, but
9 it also produces innovative
10 marketing materials for the city.
11 And in terms of visibility, it is
12 the most high impact and high-
13 profile method for the city to show
14 its support for game development to
15 both developers and the general
16 public.

17 The future of Philly as
18 a national gaming hub is absolutely
19 within our reach, but it's only
20 possible if we take immediate
21 action to support small developers
22 today. Let's use existing
23 infrastructure, existing funding
24 channels and existing initiatives

1 to give professional developers
2 creative and financial
3 opportunities while the city
4 becomes the first in the nation to
5 embrace video games as the medium
6 of the future. Thank you.

7 COUNCILMAN THOMAS:

8 Thank you. That was amazing.

9 MR. SHARPE: Thanks.

10 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Can
11 the next person please state your
12 name for the record.

13 And, sir, before you
14 leave can you just make sure that
15 Dom and my team have your
16 information. Great. Tom is
17 amazing.

18 Thank you. Please state
19 your name for the record. You may
20 begin with your next comment.

21 MR. ARNOLD: Hi. My
22 name is Corey Arnold. I'm one of
23 the very few people lucky enough to
24 be a full-time game developer here

1 in the city at this point. Before
2 this probably, more importantly for
3 this Committee, I helped found the
4 Philadelphia Game Mechanics which
5 was mentioned earlier, the
6 Community Development Group. I was
7 also the program manager of the
8 Entrepreneurial Game Studio at
9 Drexel University and helped
10 support about seven or eight
11 studios, including most of the
12 studios here as they released all
13 of their games to market.

14 The reason I mentioned
15 that background is because when
16 we're talking about the brain,
17 drain and talent that we see come
18 out of Philadelphia, I've had a
19 first front-row look at dozens of
20 studios I would say that have risen
21 and unfortunately fell before they
22 could reach their market potential.

23 I've seen all the talent
24 leave the city in my various

1 capacities here as a game whatever
2 I am, mentor or something. So I
3 bring that up just to say I'm going
4 to mention something very specific
5 from the report here that I think
6 would have solved the 12 or so
7 studios that I've seen rise and
8 fall.

9 So it's on Page 12.

10 We've already talked about it.

11 It's Bullet No. 3: The city should
12 pass legislation to establish a new
13 city agency that would serve as a
14 city-run video game publisher that
15 could fund independent
16 Philadelphia-based video games,
17 directors and companies.

18 The problem and then the
19 solution. The problem is that
20 games take a lot of time and a lot
21 of talent, but the opportunity for
22 a capital return only comes once
23 the game is finished. There's no
24 way to fund all of that talent and

1 labor at this point, so studios
2 have to work for free on the very
3 rare hope that their game somehow
4 recoups their own investment if
5 they're even able to work for free
6 for that long, which of course
7 nobody is.

8 The solution, simple
9 investments, seed grants as low as
10 \$50,000 ranging up to \$300,000
11 would have saved nearly every
12 studio that I've worked with.
13 Making a game in the course of very
14 short timeline, one to three years
15 with money that is graded across
16 that timeline, with goals that are
17 checked in, with a committee who
18 distributes these funds would have
19 gotten them to launch, gotten them
20 to market and could have
21 potentially exploded their revenue
22 if they were able to make these
23 games into market.

24 There are similar funds

1 happening in Montreal with the CMF.
2 There are similar programs that
3 were already mentioned in Georgia
4 and there's a great number of them
5 in Europe, in particular in
6 Scandinavia right now. So all of
7 those programs if we were to
8 emulate one like that here in
9 Philadelphia would be hugely
10 helpful for all of these burgeoning
11 studios. Thank you very much.

12 COUNCILMAN THOMAS:

13 Thank you.

14 Councilmember Young has
15 a question and since he's a
16 Councilmember, he can do that.
17 Technically this is public
18 comment --

19 COUNCILMAN YOUNG: I'm
20 sorry. I'm sorry about that.

21 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: --
22 but he's allowed to.

23 COUNCILMAN YOUNG:
24 What's the ROI on those investments

1 though, right, that we're looking
2 for, I mean, that investors look at
3 how much the return is going to be?
4 And as a city, right, we're going
5 to make this investment in some of
6 these spaces. What does that look
7 like when a game is successfully
8 put out to market? What's the
9 potential there?

10 MR. ARNOLD: I'm going
11 to be very clear and realistic
12 about that. The video games are
13 very specific in that they have a
14 very low initial investment and
15 have an incredibly high upside
16 because games that make it out are
17 relying upon virality, so the ROI
18 on small independent games in the
19 last year have been like
20 development terms of about
21 \$100,000, \$200,000 and returns
22 upwards of 10, 20, 30, \$300 million
23 and above.

24 That being said because

1 that's dependent on virality, the
2 only way this works is if you have
3 low investments across a number of
4 studios, so if you have a bunch of
5 studios being funded, the
6 possibility that one of them comes
7 out is much higher than if you put
8 all your eggs in one basket and
9 just hope that they're going to be
10 the next Fortnite, that is not how
11 it will work. It'll work if you
12 fund a lot of games for a little
13 bit of money and one of them could
14 emerge and fund the rest of them.
15 And believe me, we all know each
16 other. If one of them exploded,
17 we'd all just hire each other.
18 That's how it would work or we'd
19 hire new young people from Drexel,
20 et cetera.

21 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: You
22 guys are singing our love language
23 up here. This is very good to hear
24 because I like funding a lot with a

1 little bit of money more than a

2 little bit with a lot of money.

3 And for the record, \$50,000 is a

4 lot to us.

5 MR. ARNOLD: No, I

6 understand.

7 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: So I

8 just want to put that on the record

9 as well too because I hear 50,000

10 being a low number. When I hear a

11 low number, that's not what I'm

12 thinking --

13 MR. ARNOLD: I'll just

14 echo -- sorry to interrupt,

15 Councilman. I'm just going to echo

16 Nick Madonna and say that literally

17 any amount of money at these levels

18 is very important. Everybody's

19 working basically for free in the

20 hopes that their game will get

21 released and it's just not

22 sustainable at all.

23 COUNCILMAN THOMAS:

24 Well, this is good information so

1 thank you. Know that your advocacy
2 is important and this is how we
3 find out what's going on in your
4 industry.

5 I want to allow you to
6 provide your public comment and
7 then I understand it's one other
8 person after this. So the one
9 other person, you can come up and
10 make your way up. And we're only
11 going to allow one minute for the
12 last public comment so we can get
13 ready to close out.

14 Go ahead, sir. Please
15 state your name for the record.
16 You may begin with your testimony.

17 MR. WU: My name is
18 Hunter Wu. Esteemed members of
19 this Committee, I stand before you
20 today as both a game developer and
21 a concerned citizen to advocate for
22 the transformative investment in
23 Philadelphia's future. My name is
24 Hunter Wu and I'm the founder of

1 Matrioshka Games for the past six
2 years.

3 I've been developing
4 games right here in Philadelphia
5 with my own company that I built
6 during my time at Drexel
7 University. We've released two
8 commercial titles and now we work
9 for other big studios providing
10 engineering support. My job as a
11 game director and businessman is to
12 pitch to you and pitch to investors
13 to convince you to give me money to
14 make this immersive and engaging
15 world.

16 Right now I want to
17 pitch to you another world. The
18 world that we will live in 10 years
19 from now right here in
20 Philadelphia, a city that will
21 bring gaming businesses from every
22 continent to the most historic city
23 in the United States.

24 Earlier you guys were

1 talking about San Francisco in
2 California. What happens there
3 every year, GDC, the world's
4 biggest gaming convention ever.
5 Every year that event brings in \$40
6 million to San Francisco. You know
7 how much a ticket cost to GDC? The
8 lowest ticket is \$200. The most
9 expensive ticket is \$1,000 per
10 person. People come in by the
11 thousands to these events.

12 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: How
13 much does PHL Gaming cost again?

14 MR. WU: It was free
15 last year.

16 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Oh,
17 man, we got to do something
18 different. I'm sorry. Go ahead.

19 MR. WU: So imagine if
20 Philadelphia could get a fraction
21 of that, how can we get there,
22 right. You want to invest in the
23 gaming businesses here, build that
24 infrastructure. What if we had our

1 own GDC on the East Coast. Do you
2 know how many people would come
3 here? We could provide educational
4 game development panels. We could
5 provide esports events. We could
6 provide networking places where
7 businesses from all over the world
8 come here to make business deals in
9 the gaming sector. That's just an
10 idea.

11 I want to talk about how
12 when I started my company, my
13 partners when times got tough they
14 actually left Philadelphia. They
15 didn't stay. I stayed here because
16 I believe that we have an
17 opportunity here to really turn
18 Philadelphia into the gaming city
19 that it can be.

20 I'm not going to say how
21 much money the game industry makes.
22 You guys already know all that, but
23 there's a lot of potential here
24 that's still untapped. We want to

1 keep these developers in the city,
2 right. I want to bring my
3 developers I work with here. Hey,
4 guys, come to Philadelphia.
5 They're like why. Like the rent is
6 cheap, right. That's all I can say
7 right now. But maybe in the future
8 there's other reasons why I can
9 bring people here.

10 As a side hustle to keep
11 my business afloat, I also work as
12 a substitute teacher. And I've
13 worked in schools all the way from
14 North Philly to South Philly and
15 I've seen the way that games change
16 these kids. I've seen special ed
17 students showcase and express
18 themselves through games. I've
19 seen the rowdiest middle school
20 students in the classroom actually
21 sit down and engage when we're
22 talking about games and playing
23 games and using gaming in
24 education.

1 In the future in 50
2 years I'm going to be an old man.
3 I'm going to be sitting in a
4 nursing home playing video games.
5 Who's going to be building those
6 games? The kids that are growing
7 up today. To achieve this vision,
8 we got to support the gaming
9 businesses that exist here right
10 now, the pillars of Philly gaming
11 industry.

12 It's not really just
13 about games, right. It's about
14 jobs, innovation, building a
15 brighter future for Philadelphia.
16 It's about empowering our youth and
17 also creating a city where they can
18 thrive in the future and fulfill
19 their dreams maybe being game
20 developers. So let's invest in
21 game development in Philadelphia,
22 make Philadelphia a leader in this
23 exciting and dynamic industry.
24 Thank you.

1 COUNCILMAN THOMAS:

2 Thank you for your comments. We
3 appreciate it.

4 Last but not least,
5 please state your name for the
6 record, sir, and you may begin with
7 your testimony.

8 MR. KINNIBREW: How
9 y'all doing. My name is Edward
10 Kinnibrew. I'm the founder and CEO
11 of Mindset of Champions. We have
12 six locations here in the city of
13 Philadelphia that provide
14 afterschool programs for our youth
15 here in the city of Philadelphia.
16 We're in every part of the city
17 right now except for South
18 Philadelphia.

19 And I just want to talk
20 about esports from just a different
21 lens right fast. I heard a lot of
22 talk today from a dev standpoint,
23 from game developers and stuff like
24 that. My standpoint is coming from

1 esports as education, and my
2 theory, Councilman Thomas, I don't
3 have the high school diploma or
4 skill set that a lot of these
5 people have. I never even had a
6 regular job.

7 I did a lot of street
8 stuff. I went to jail and all that
9 kind of stuff, but esports was my
10 pathway to change all that kind of
11 stuff and I don't play no video
12 games. So my theory is what I
13 didn't hear was an identity that
14 the city itself wanted to take.
15 I'm looking from hearing the
16 conversation that's going into the
17 direction of game development, but
18 esports is still a baby across
19 United States.

20 You're looking at stats
21 and I don't want you to skew the
22 numbers and think an isolated
23 incident is applied to the whole
24 industry itself because the whole

1 industry ain't figured out just
2 yet. So I want to make sure us as
3 a city we do it in a way that
4 benefits us as a city.

5 So when I say esports as
6 an education, I'm looking at what
7 should the city's identity be to
8 actually stand out in this space
9 and I would like to look at why not
10 the city itself be a pipeline for
11 esports, why not create the whole
12 developmental pipeline from K to 12
13 with actual jobs, the whole
14 industry itself.

15 I think if the city
16 separates itself and become the
17 actual place to go to develop
18 talent and gain skills in the whole
19 realm of esports, I think that
20 would be the way that you would
21 separate yourself from the
22 Chicagos, the Californias and all
23 the other places. We don't want
24 somebody else's dream to become our

1 nightmare. Just because something
2 worked in Chicago don't mean it's
3 going to work here in Philadelphia.
4 And that's all I had is a minute
5 and that's all I wanted to say and
6 that's it.

7 COUNCILMAN THOMAS:

8 Well, thank you and thank you for
9 the work that you do with young
10 people as well because that is
11 something that's near and dear to
12 my heart as well as my colleagues
13 as well. We're fathers and we're
14 always thinking about the next
15 generation of young people.

16 And the reference that
17 you made, I don't know if I'm going
18 to be playing video games at 90.
19 That would be a blessing if the
20 fingers move that way and the brain
21 moves that way, but I do agree with
22 you that this generation is making
23 and paving the way and they are
24 going to be the future that takes

1 care of us. So thank you both.

2 Thank you to everybody
3 who came out today. Thank you for
4 all the great work that you're
5 doing in the gaming industry. Most
6 of us are just consumers on the
7 government side, if anything at
8 all. So the work that you're
9 doing, the perspective that you
10 provide, the information that you
11 gave us and, most importantly, the
12 collaboration after this will
13 determine what the future of gaming
14 will consist of in the city of
15 Philadelphia.

16 Before we close out,
17 thank you to my colleague
18 Councilmember Young who's always
19 one of the most intelligent young
20 guys I know, but always very
21 thoughtful about these critical
22 issues related to the city of
23 Philadelphia. So members of the
24 Task Force, please get to know

1 Councilmember Young.

2 Councilmember Lozada,
3 Councilmember Rue Landau,
4 Councilmember Squilla, all of them
5 when I talk about this gaming stuff
6 have an appetite to figure out what
7 can we do because the numbers don't
8 lie. The economy of it is real.

9 And when we think about what we're
10 obligated to do as elected
11 officials, there's an opportunity
12 here that we can't deny. But like
13 it was said, we got to figure out
14 what our knack is going to be as a
15 city because we do want
16 Philadelphia to be a gaming city.

17 As I close out, again
18 thank you all. I want to thank my
19 Chief of Staff Dom Miller and my
20 entire team, Team Thomas, they do
21 an amazing job. But I just want
22 you to know, I know it's not like
23 super crowded here, I want to thank
24 the Sergeant-at-Arms and the Tech

1 staff. They always do great. It's
2 not a whole lot of folks here.
3 It's not super crowded here.

4 But I really just one
5 more time want to close out with
6 thanking Ms. Tempest Carter. And
7 the reason I'm thanking her is
8 because you guys don't do this all
9 the time and we do. Very rarely do
10 the Administration stay for the
11 entire hearing, especially when
12 it's as long as this one is.

13 So for Ms. Carter to
14 stay the entire time to listen to
15 every testimony, every public
16 comment, my monologues, taking
17 notes, right, it means a lot not
18 just to me, but it means a lot to
19 the industry because they
20 understand that this Mayor and this
21 Commerce Department is serious
22 about gaming and hopefully puts a
23 little battery in their back so
24 when they're talking to people in

1 the industry both in Philadelphia
2 as well as outside Philadelphia
3 they can have the same level of
4 excitement that we have to
5 encourage people that it's a new
6 day in gaming for the city of
7 Philadelphia. So thank you all.

8 With that being said,
9 it's something formal I'm supposed
10 to say to close this hearing out.
11 Where's that at -- okay.

12 Are there any other
13 questions or comments from members
14 of the Committee or anybody in the
15 public?

16 (No response.)

17 COUNCILMAN THOMAS:

18 Hearing none, I want to say thank
19 you to everybody who came out to
20 testify. I want to thank all of
21 the panels and witnesses for your
22 participation today. Of course
23 like I said before, we value your
24 opinion. And this concludes the

1 business before the Committee of
2 Legislative Oversight. We will now
3 recess the hearing at the call of
4 the Chair, which means we will
5 continue this conversation in the
6 near future. Thank you everybody.
7 Have a good day.

8 (Committee on
9 Legislative Oversight concluded at
10 4:31 p.m.)

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

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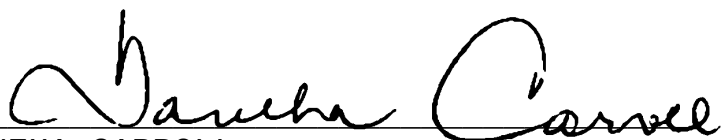
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TANEHA CARROLL
Court Reporter - Notary Public

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