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COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA
PUBLIC HEARING
BEFORE THE COMMITTEE ON PARKS,
RECREATION & CULTURAL AFFAIRS

- - -

Room 400, City Hall
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Thursday, June 11, 1998
10:15 a.m.

- - -

BILL 980446 - An Ordinance renaming the Cobbs Creek
Skate House in the Park to the Laura Simms Skate
House in Cobbs Creek Park.

- - -

PRESENT:

COUNCILWOMAN DONNA REED MILLER, Chair
COUNCILMAN RICHARD T. MARIANO, Vice Chair

COUNCILWOMAN HAPPY FERNANDEZ
COUNCILMAN JAMES F. KENNEY
COUNCILWOMAN JOAN L. KRAJEWSKI
COUNCILMAN W. THACHER LONGSTRETH
COUNCILMAN FRANK RIZZO
COUNCILWOMAN MARIAN B. TASCO
COUNCILWOMAN ANNA C. VERNA
COUNCILWOMAN JANNIE BLACKWELL
COUNCILMAN DAVID COHEN
COUNCILMAN MICHAEL A. NUTTER

- - -

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1 BILL 980446

2 COUNCILWOMAN MILLER: Good morning.

3 This is a special Committee on Parks, Recreation and
4 Cultural Affairs. And this committee is now in
5 session.

6 In attendance this morning, for
7 purposes of a quorum, is Councilwoman Krajewski,
8 Councilwoman Anna Verna, Councilman Nutter,
9 Councilman Longstreth, Councilwoman Jannie
10 Blackwell, and I am Donna Reed Miller, Councilwoman
11 and Chair of this committee.

12 Will the clerk please read the title
13 of the bill.

14 THE CLERK: Bill No. 980446, an
15 Ordinance renaming the Cobbs Creek Skate House in
16 the Park to the Laura Sims Skate House in Cobbs
17 Creek Park.

18 COUNCILWOMAN MILLER: Thank you. Is
19 there any one here to testify for or against this
20 bill?

21 Can Miss Donna Sims please come to
22 the witness able, and Delores Capers.

23 For the record, we have been joined
24 by Councilwoman Fernandez and Councilman Rizzo.

25 Is there an order of preference as to

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2 who goes first?

3 Miss Sims, you are scheduled to speak
4 first.

5 Please state your name, and spell
6 your last name, and any other identifying
7 information for the record.

8 MS. DONNA SIMS: Good morning. My
9 name is Donna Sims. I am on the Advisory Board of
10 the Cobbs Creek Skate House in the Park. The last
11 name is spelled S-I-M-S.

12 We are here today -- first, I can't
13 really begin without first giving honor to God for
14 allowing us to be here, just for allowing everything
15 that is taking place this day, just for allowing it
16 to take place.

17 We thank Councilwoman Blackwell and
18 Mr. Blackwell for the years of support that they
19 have given the skate house and the people of West
20 Philadelphia. Not only for their support, but for
21 the way they delivered their support.

22 My mother, Laura Sims, truly
23 appreciated them and appreciated their manner and
24 their support.

25 We are thankful for those people who

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2 have come out today to be with us, our other Board
3 members, our family and friends, and the children
4 from Turner Middle School, who were one of the first
5 children who were part of our school program at the
6 Cobbs Creek Skate House. They were also the
7 children who originally named the rink Cobbs Creek
8 Skate House.

9 So we thank them, their principal,
10 Mr. DelFonzo, their teacher, Nan Levy for bringing
11 them here today to show their support.

12 We thank you for honoring my mother,
13 Laura Sims. Mother had a very gentle, very sweet
14 and caring spirit.

15 Those of you who no her, know that --
16 you know that about her. Everything that you saw,
17 magnify that by ten, and that's what she was like at
18 home.

19 Everything that she did, we know it
20 will live on. Not only in the organizations and the
21 lives that she touched, but in just -- in the
22 children of the community. In every aspect we look
23 around and we see her, her touch.

24 And to say that we miss her, and she
25 just went home to be with the Lord two months ago,

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2 is a tremendous understatement. But we see her
3 every day.

4 We see her in the children's eyes.
5 We see her in the way that she -- just the way she
6 approached things. And we are so pleased and
7 blessed that the Councilwoman would seek to honor
8 her today.

9 Mother was involved with the skate
10 house and with many other organizations. And
11 because of her, I would just say, her very sincere,
12 unselfish support, many of those -- not many; all of
13 them will continue on.

14 She used to say, it is not what you
15 do in this life, it is what continues on once you
16 are gone. If it stops once you leave, then
17 something was wrong. It is what continues on long
18 after you are gone.

19 So it is really hard to tell all of
20 you about my mother, about Laura Sims. Many of you
21 have met her and you know her. But for those who
22 did not, we know that she is still alive.
23 Everything that made her who she is, it is still
24 very much alive, and we will see her again.

25 But here on this earth, we know that

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2 those things will continue to live on in the work
3 that she has done.

4 The skate house was something that I
5 grew up with seeing, seeing her work on from the
6 time I was in high school.

7 I would go to bed at night, and my
8 mother was on her knees praying. I would wake up
9 the next morning, and she was still on her knees.
10 And that said something to me, that quiet spirit.

11 And other times she would be on her
12 knees. Next time, 5 o'clock in the morning, she
13 would be on the phone calling people and talking to
14 people and writing letters.

15 And I think that the greatest lesson
16 she taught us was that, if you believe in something,
17 you just never, ever give up.

18 And her vision was for the children.
19 It was for the children of our community, that they
20 have access to something that she felt they were
21 being denied.

22 And when people told us that black
23 children don't ice skate, my mother would -- she was
24 a very quiet and very demure woman, but it incensed
25 her. But, she was incensed in a very quiet and

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2 dignified way, but it just made her stronger. So I
3 applaud that strength because it has taught us all
4 lessons.

5 And we vow to continue the work that
6 she began. And I am very pleased to say that with
7 the group that we have, and the Board that we have,
8 I believe that it will continue, with much prayer.

9 So that's primarily what I want to
10 say. As you honor my mother today, you are really
11 honoring that spirit that I think she shared with
12 all of us.

13 And she was truly a selfless woman.
14 She never wanted anything for herself. She never
15 did. And there are people who are like that in
16 public, and then they are different behind the
17 closed doors. Magnify that, and that's what she was
18 like at home.

19 So I am very thankful that God
20 blessed us with her for a short time. I am very
21 thankful.

22 COUNCILWOMAN MILLER: Thank you, Miss
23 Sims.

24 Are there any questions of this
25 witness?

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2 (Applause.)

3 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Madam Chair,
4 I only wanted to say, I passed out copies to my
5 colleagues here -- all the neighbors have seen it --
6 of the article that was in the West Side Weekly,
7 written by Tyrie Johnson.

8 And the article says that, quote, She
9 was a perfect lady, a classy lady, recalled Lucien
10 Blackwell, the former Congressman, who, when he was
11 the neighborhood City Councilman, pushed the
12 legislation through to get the skate house built.

13 Lucien Blackwell remembers how Miss
14 Sims used to call him nearly every morning when he
15 was Councilman in the '70s, even the days he was
16 working on the waterfront.

17 I remember when Lou was in the middle
18 of a strike -- and you SEPTA folks will appreciate
19 being in the middle of a strike -- and there is a
20 little lady on the phone saying, "Mr. Blackwell,
21 Mr. Blackwell, what about my rink?"

22 And it was like that. When the late
23 Charles Durne became a judge and Lucien came here,
24 the first person who approached him was Miss Laura
25 Sims. And she said, "I want an ice rink."

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2 And my colleagues will respect the
3 fact that when we looked around in the budget, it
4 wasn't there. You know, in between the time
5 somebody goes and somebody comes, anything can
6 happen to your projects. But Mrs. Sims made sure he
7 found out that it was there.

8 I quote again. When some neighbors
9 rose up against a proposal because they felt it
10 would attract juvenile gang activity, Blackwell said
11 it was Mrs. Sims who led the fight to keep the
12 project alive and on course.

13 Today, added Blackwell, because of
14 her, the community has one of the finest ice rinks
15 in the country. And this was stated certainly by
16 the Flyers, that we have the best in the region.

17 And let me finally say to her
18 daughter, Donna and her son John, we thank you both
19 for being here, and all the members of the
20 community.

21 That I remembered when we were near
22 completion and Mrs. Sims said, "We want to name this
23 rink after you, Mr. Blackwell."

24 And he said, "No, let's not do that."
25 And so it is ironic and a blessing for us to be able

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2 to in some way say we loved her and thank you by
3 naming it after her.

4 Thank you.

5 MS. SIMS: Thank you very much.

6 (Applause.)

7 MS. SIMS: Excuse me. May I add one
8 point? This is just ten seconds.

9 One thing that is very important to
10 add, we now have a young man that is in training for
11 the Olympics. And I think you need to know that.
12 He is a national champion. He has come from West
13 Philadelphia.

14 So visions, this is really for the
15 future. And with these children who are from
16 Turner, you never know who your future Olympians
17 are. They are the children who live right next
18 door.

19 Thank you.

20 (Applause.)

21 COUNCILWOMAN MILLER: Thank you.

22 Do any members of the committee have
23 any questions for Ms. Sims?

24 The second witness then is Ms.
25 Delores Capers.

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2 Ms. Capers, please state your name
3 and your title for the record.

4 MS. DELORES CAPERS: Thank you. My
5 name is Delores Capers. The last name is spelled
6 C-A-P-E-R-S. I am the newly elected President of
7 the Cobbs Creek Advisory Board.

8 I served as Vice-President under
9 Laura Sims. So it is indeed my honor and my
10 pleasure that the Advisory Board has put their
11 confidence in me.

12 Those of you who new Ms. Sims, she
13 was a small woman, but she was big of heart and big
14 of spirit. So I have some real big shoes to fill.

15 I also have a second reason for being
16 in support of this particular naming of the facility
17 after Ms. Sims.

18 My brother who is an architect,
19 Theodore Capers, Jr., was the major architect for
20 designing the skate house. And he is deceased eight
21 years ago, and it was because of him that I became
22 involved with the skate house and the Advisory
23 Board.

24 The skate house is more than just an
25 ice-skating rink. We have a number of programs that

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2 are available to the community.

3 During the summer now, we have roller
4 hockey, we have roller-skating. We have opened the
5 rink so that the children will not have to skate on
6 the streets in West Philadelphia, and being a safe
7 environment away from traffic, and other people. We
8 have arts and crafts. We do aerobics there.

9 We are desperately in need of a
10 community room so that we can expand the programs
11 that we are doing. And this is something that Ms.
12 Sims had worked diligently on, and was trying to get
13 some additional funding.

14 So Councilwoman Blackwell and the
15 rest of the Council, you will be hearing from us
16 again in the future, so that we can get those
17 funds.

18 I am very pleased that the Advisory
19 Board members and officers, we have a newly elected
20 Vice-President, Irma Parker. And she is the mother
21 of Duane Parker, the young man that Donna mentioned
22 who is here.

23 We are all committed that we are
24 going to carry on the tradition that Laura Sims
25 started with the skate house. We will be planning

1 BILL 980446

2 an appropriate dedication some time in the fall, and
3 will be contacting the Councilmembers and the
4 Mayor's Office and Recreation Department and all
5 those organizations she was involved with.

6 So we thank you, Councilwoman
7 Blackwell, and her husband, Lucien. At the day of
8 the funeral they made the announcement that they
9 wanted to rename this skate house in honor of her.
10 And I am so glad that has come to fruition in such a
11 small period of time.

12 And her legacy will carry on. Not
13 only in the name, but in the activities that we are
14 going to have there.

15 And I thank you very much.

16 COUNCILWOMAN MILLER: Thank you.

17 (Applause.)

18 COUNCILWOMAN MILLER: Are there any
19 questions of this witness from committee members?
20 Thank you.

21 Thank you, Ms. Sims. Thank you, Ms.
22 Capers.

23 I need to make note for the record
24 that we have been joined at the table by Councilman
25 Mariano and Councilwoman Tasco.

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2 The next two witnesses can both come
3 to the table, Carole Chew Williams and Nanzetta
4 Leavy.

5 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: While they
6 are sitting, let me add that Councilman Rizzo
7 reminds me that Lucien put in a call to his father.

8 And we know the old days, the
9 problems we had with Blackwell and Rizzo, and so
10 many members of our community with Mayor Rizzo. But
11 certainly that changed before he passed, and he was
12 certainly involved.

13 I thank the Councilman for reminding
14 me. He said he was around when his late father took
15 the call.

16 So even though we had our battles
17 during those days, which were later healed, in some
18 projects everybody works together. And this was one
19 that everybody agreed was great for the community.

20 COUNCILWOMAN MILLER: Thank you.
21 Please identify yourself for the record, and spell
22 your last name and even your first name. It was one
23 of those difficult names.

24 And we can start with Nanzetta
25 Leavy.

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2 MS. NANZETTA LEAVY: Nanzetta Leavy.

3 I am on the Board of the Advisory Council of the
4 Cobbs Creek Skate House. I am also the President
5 Emeritus of the Friends of Cobbs Creek Park. Today
6 it gives me great pleasure to come before the
7 Council.

8 COUNCILWOMAN MILLER: It is a
9 pleasure to have you.

10 Can you spell your first and last
11 name, Ms. Leavy, for the record.

12 MS. LEAVY: N-A-N-Z-E-T-T-A, L-E-A-V,
13 as in Victor, Y.

14 COUNCILWOMAN MILLER: Thank you. We
15 are ready for your testimony.

16 MS. LEAVY: Again, it gives me great
17 pleasure to come before the Council to speak about
18 Laura Sims.

19 To sum up the things that I heard
20 addressed about Laura, Laura, to know Laura, she was
21 devoted, she had perseverance, she had faith, and
22 she gave service.

23 She was devoted to her church, her
24 family, and to the community. She persevered. When
25 Laura wanted something, she went after it with

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2 determination.

3 She had faith. She believed in her
4 idea, and she pursued it and implemented her idea.

5 And her unyielding service to the
6 community, to her family, and to the church, and I
7 don't want to leave out Fairmount Park.

8 Also I see sitting to the far right
9 of the Council is Councilman Thacher Longstreth.
10 Laura knew Nancy very well. They were very good
11 friends.

12 So on behalf of the Advisory Council,
13 the Friends of Cobbs Creek Park, the students in the
14 Cobbs Creek community and beyond, we are very
15 grateful and thankful that you are renaming the
16 Cobbs Creek Skate House.

17 Thank you.

18 COUNCILWOMAN MILLER: Thank you, Ms.
19 Leavy.

20 (Applause.)

21 COUNCILWOMAN MILLER: Are there any
22 questions from the committee of this witness?

23 Thank you, Ms. Leavy.

24 Ms. Carole Williams.

25 MS. CAROLE CHEW WILLIAMS: I am

1 BILL 980446

2 Carole, with an E, Chew, C-H-E-W, Williams. I am
3 here representing several people.

4 I am representing Senator Williams,
5 State Representative Anthony H. Williams, I am his
6 mother, and I am also the President of the Cobbs
7 Creek Community Environmental Education Center.

8 And in closing, I would like to ask
9 all of the representatives of the Advisory Council
10 from the skate house to please stand.

11 (Members stand.)

12 (Applause.)

13 MS. WILLIAMS: And I would like the
14 young people from the Turner Middle School to
15 stand. They have been excellent.

16 (Applause.)

17 MS. WILLIAMS: And may I have the
18 hockey members and the mother of one of the hockey
19 members to stand.

20 (Members stand.)

21 (Applause.)

22 MS. WILLIAMS: And being a
23 grandmother also, I would like the two grandchildren
24 of Laura Sims to stand.

25 (Grandchildren stand.)

1 BILL 980446

2 (Applause.)

3 MS. WILLIAMS: The oldest one is on
4 his way to Valley Forge Military College in the
5 fall.

6 (Applause.)

7 MS. WILLIAMS: I am really just
8 grateful that Laura and -- I not only served on her
9 Advisory Board, but we were personal friends. Our
10 children grew up together.

11 And I want the children especially to
12 know that you don't necessarily have to wear the hat
13 of a judge, or that you have to be the President of
14 the United States, or that you have to be a public
15 official. That you can be a mother, a devoted
16 church goer, and you can believe in your community
17 enough to see a need, and then gather a group of
18 people to say, "This is an important project. Help
19 me make it happen."

20 So the message to our community --
21 and I thank Council for the willingness and for Ms.
22 Blackwell and her husband to be the spearhead of
23 this renaming.

24 It is a model to our children that
25 regardless of color, of religion, or ethnic and

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2 economic background, that you can make a
3 difference.

4 And this will be a legacy to our
5 community that Laura Sims, indeed, made a
6 difference.

7 Thank you very much.

8 COUNCILWOMAN MILLER: Thank you, Ms.
9 Williams.

10 Does any member of the committee have
11 any questions or comments for these witnesses?

12 Councilman Jim Kenney.

13 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: Thank you. And
14 thank you for taking the time to come today. I know
15 it means a lot to you to have this ice rink, this
16 wonderful facility, renamed.

17 I just want to tell you a little
18 story about my involvement with that facility that
19 has really opened my eyes in many ways.

20 In 1967, '68, thereabouts, I started
21 following ice hockey, when the Flyers first came
22 into town.

23 And that is absolutely my favorite
24 sport in the universe. I think it is one of the
25 best sports there ever was, and have played and

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2 followed and been involved in it even until today,
3 as a coach at the Rizzo Rink down in South
4 Philadelphia, where my son plays.

5 Through Ms. Sims and the people who
6 worked at the rink, I had an opportunity to get
7 involved in the fledgling ice hockey program at
8 Cobbs Creek, Cobbs Ice Rink.

9 We helped to provide some equipment
10 and some contacts with equipment suppliers and some
11 funds to get this sport started.

12 Because it is so expensive, the
13 equipment is so expensive, as compared to basketball
14 or other sports, where children, sometimes their
15 families don't have the money to buy that good
16 equipment.

17 But as a result of the efforts in
18 that area, including -- as a matter of fact, the
19 Phantoms, as you know, just won the Cup in the AHL
20 last night here in Philadelphia.

21 One of the players there is an
22 African-Canadian player by the name of Bruce Kohls.
23 And Bruce came out, at our request, to do a clinic
24 at the rink. And we have also had the opportunity
25 to bring the kids down to the CoreStates Center for

1 BILL 980446

2 some Flyers games. It has been a wonderful
3 experience.

4 But the most important part of it is
5 that the children from Cobbs have had an opportunity
6 to go to Rizzo, and Rizzo has had an opportunity to
7 go to Cobbs. And these kids have had a chance to
8 play together in a sport that traditionally has been
9 basically a white-only sport.

10 And these children have flourished
11 and have gotten so much better at what they are
12 doing, and have found now an opportunity to do
13 things in the wintertime, when the basketball courts
14 are frozen, the baseball fields are frozen, and they
15 can get indoors on a rink and get into other
16 neighborhoods so that kids can see they have
17 something in common.

18 And I think that, in the end, is one
19 of the biggest legacies of Laura Sims, is bringing
20 children together from all parts of the city.

21 So I thank you very much for coming
22 in today. Thank you.

23 MS. WILLIAMS: Thank you.

24 (Applause.)

25 COUNCILWOMAN MILLER: Does any other

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2 committee members have any questions or comments of
3 this witness?

4 The next witness we have is Charles
5 Hammock.

6 Good morning Mr. Hammock, please
7 state your name and spell your last name for the
8 record.

9 MR. CHARLES HAMMOCK: Charles
10 Hammock, H-A-M-M-O-C-K. I am here this morning
11 representing several entities.

12 First of all, Samuel Evans asked me
13 to -- and you all know Sam Evans -- asked me to
14 speak on his behalf, as well as the AFNA program.

15 It is nice to see Councilwoman
16 Blackwell, Councilman Longstreth. I just left
17 Councilman Kenney on another matter.

18 Let me say that on behalf of
19 Mr. Evans, that Laura Sims and Mr. Evans worked
20 together for over 50 years in community
21 organizations, in many endeavors across this city.
22 And Ms. Sims was very active in helping Mr. Evans
23 bring together the AFNA program.

24 As many of you know, AFNA is a
25 program of supplementary education designed to aid

1 BILL 980446

2 students to achieve the academic requirements of the
3 school in which they attend.

4 AFNA also is designed to bring
5 students through to professional careers. And in
6 that effort, over the years, some 28 years, AFNA has
7 taken students beginning in the 8th grade, through
8 high, college, and professional schools, has brought
9 through over 400 medical doctors, 350 lawyers, 66
10 Ph.D.s in various disciplines, and over 3,500
11 college graduates, and have enrolled over
12 10,000-and-a-half students.

13 Because of the help of Councilmen
14 such as Councilman Longstreth and others, AFNA a has
15 been a tremendous success. And just recently
16 Senator Specter has put in a bill in the United
17 States Senate to have AFNA replicated across this
18 nation.

19 Mr. Evans asked me to convey to the
20 Council this morning the fact that Laura Sims played
21 a tremendous part in launching AFNA, beginning in
22 1968.

23 I would also say, on behalf of Ms.
24 Sims and her family, Donna Sims and her family, that
25 beginning in the fall, there will be a scholarship

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2 endowment in the name of Laura Sims. And Mr. Evans
3 will be working to support that and bring that
4 about.

5 So it is a real pleasure for me to
6 speak for Sam Evans and the AFNA program.

7 We thank Councilwoman Blackwell and
8 all of the Council. I just see Councilman Cohen.
9 Mr. Evans asked me to pay you a special hello.

10 And we would hope that this would be
11 approved as quickly as possible. And so on behalf
12 of Samuel Evans and Charles Hammock and the AFNA
13 program, we thank you.

14 COUNCILWOMAN MILLER: Thank you,
15 Mr. Hammock.

16 Do any committee members have
17 questions or comments for this witness?

18 Okay. Thank you.

19 Is there anyone else here to testify
20 for or against this bill?

21 Seeing none, this concludes the
22 Public Hearing.

23 (Public Hearing adjourned.)

24 - - -

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1
2 COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA
3 PUBLIC MEETING
4 of the
5 COMMITTEE ON PARKS, RECREATION & CULTURAL AFFAIRS
6 - - -
7 Thursday, June 11, 1998
8 - - -
9 Public Meeting conducted by the Committee
10 on Parks, Recreation & Cultural Affairs, held in
11 Room 400, City Hall, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, on
12 the above date, to consider action on the following:
13 BILL 980446
14 - - -
15 PRESENT:
16 COUNCILWOMAN DONNA REED MILLER, Chair
17 COUNCILWOMAN HAPPY FERNANDEZ
18 COUNCILMAN JAMES F. KENNEY
19 COUNCILMAN W. THACHER LONGSTRETH
20 COUNCILMAN FRANK RIZZO
21 COUNCILWOMAN MARIAN B. TASCO
22 COUNCILWOMAN JANNIE BLACKWELL
23
24
25

1 PUBLIC MEETING

2 COUNCILWOMAN MILLER: We will now
3 move into our Public Meeting.

4 The Chair recognizes Councilwoman
5 Blackwell for a motion on Bill No. 980446.

6 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank you,
7 Madam Chair.

8 I move that Bill No. 980446 be
9 reported out of committee with a suspension of the
10 Rules so that it can be considered at our first
11 session of Council.

12 (Duly seconded.)

13 COUNCILWOMAN MILLER: All in favor.
14 Opposed?

15 This committee will report Bill No.
16 980446 out of committee with a favorable
17 recommendation, and a request that the Rules be
18 suspended as to permit first reading at our next
19 regularly scheduled Council session.

20 I want to thank everyone for coming.
21 I think that Ms. Laura Sims sounds like she was a
22 very special lady.

23 And this concludes the Public
24 Meeting. Thank you.

25 (Public Meeting adjourned at 10:50

1 PUBLIC MEETING

2 a.m.)

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

I HEREBY CERTIFY that the foregoing
proceedings of the Council of the City of
Philadelphia of Thursday, June 11, 1998, were
reported fully and accurately by me, and that this
is a correct transcript of same.

RE: COMMITTEE ON PARKS, RECREATION & CULTURAL
AFFAIRS

DEBRA A. WHITEHEAD, RPR