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COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA
PUBLIC HEARING BEFORE
COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY

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- - -
Room 400, City Hall
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Tuesday, 6/12/01
1:25 p.m.

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RES. 010281 - Re Feltonville Sinking Homes.

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PRESENT: COUNCILMAN ANGEL L. ORTIZ, Chair
COUNCILWOMAN JOAN KRAJEWSKI, Vice Chair
COUNCILWOMAN JANNIE L. BLACKWELL
COUNCILWOMAN BLONDELL REYNOLDS BROWN
COUNCILMAN DARRELL L. CLARKE
COUNCILMAN DAVID COHEN
COUNCILMAN FRANK RIZZO

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2 P R O C E E D I N G S

3 COUNCILMAN ORTIZ: Good afternoon, good
4 afternoon. The City Council Committee on Public
5 Safety is now in session regarding Resolution No.
6 010175.

7 Over a month ago, we were here. We
8 asked the Administration at that time to tell us
9 what timeline they needed for them to develop a plan
10 for Feltonville. We didn't say what the time was --
11 we didn't say a week, we didn't say two weeks; we
12 asked them, we asked the Administration to develop a
13 plan and give us when that plan would be ready.
14 After a back-and-forth, they said that they would do
15 it in a month. Today is that month.

16 We have parts of the residents of
17 Feltonville here. Councilman Clarke is here,
18 Councilman Cohen, Councilwoman Blondell Reynolds.

19 All the people need, all they want, all
20 they're asking from the City Administration is that
21 they give them some hope, that their problem is
22 going to be addressed. I would like the City to
23 come up and say whether there is going to be a
24 glimmer of hope or we have the weakest link once
25 again.

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2 (Witnesses come forward.)

3 COUNCILMAN ORTIZ: Please identify
4 yourself for the record.

5 MR. SOLVIBILE: Bob Solvibile, First
6 Deputy Commissioner, Licenses and Inspections.

7 MS. RIVERA: Diana Rivera, Divisional
8 Deputy, Risk Management.

9 MR. ROY: Richard Roy, Acting Water
10 Commissioner.

11 COUNCILMAN ORTIZ: I didn't get your
12 name.

13 MS. RIVERA: Diana Rivera.

14 COUNCILMAN ORTIZ: Diana Rivera.

15 Who's going to speak for the group?

16 MS. RIVERA: I will.

17 Good afternoon, Mr. Ortiz. I'm sorry to
18 say that Mr. Parella was supposed to be here to
19 testify today. Unfortunately, he had a death in his
20 family so it's left up to me. I have Mr. Bob
21 Solvibile and Mr. Dick Roy.

22 At the May 9th testimony, the
23 Administration had said we would have a plan.

24 COUNCILMAN ORTIZ: You don't have a
25 plan.

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2 MS. RIVERA: No, there's no easy fix
3 right now. We have no long-term solution right
4 now. We're still working on it.

5 COUNCILMAN ORTIZ: How long do you think
6 you would need?

7 MS. RIVERA: Well, right now, next week,
8 we're planning to have Professor Spirn come down and
9 also Mr. (indiscernible) from USGS to develop a
10 strategy for overall subsidence problems in
11 Philadelphia, not only in Feltonville.

12 COUNCILMAN ORTIZ: But we have a real
13 emergency here. Don't you think we have a real
14 emergency here?

15 MS. RIVERA: Yes, we believe that.

16 COUNCILMAN ORTIZ: All right? We have a
17 whole neighborhood. And I'm sorry, Miss Rivera, you
18 know, it shouldn't be you who -- I mean, Darrell a
19 little while ago was sort of venting on someone and
20 he said to her at that point, "I shouldn't be doing
21 this because you're not the person that should be
22 responsible for this," and you're not.

23 MS. RIVERA: I appreciate that.

24 COUNCILMAN ORTIZ: And so whatever I do
25 say, please, it's directed at the person or persons

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2 who are not here today.

3 MS. RIVERA: Understood.

4 COUNCILMAN ORTIZ: We have a problem and
5 we have an administration that keeps telling us that
6 it's concerned about blight. This is a neighborhood
7 that is not yet destroyed, it is a working-class
8 neighborhood. People own their homes, they have
9 mortgages, they pay taxes, they pay property taxes.
10 They deserve better from the government they elect.
11 They've been petitioning now for more than two
12 years. Reverend Kirk has been on a crusade now for
13 more than ten.

14 REVEREND KIRK: Seventeen.

15 COUNCILMAN ORTIZ: Seventeen.

16 COUNCILMAN ORTIZ: And you come here,
17 and after a month, this is all you bring.

18 Tell me what it is that you're doing
19 with OHCD. Explain to me, what is this application
20 to obtain federal funding, which will be dedicated
21 to these residents? Tell me, what's that about?

22 MS. RIVERA: There was a letter dated
23 May 9, 2001 to the Philadelphia City Council
24 Committee on Public Safety from Robert Brady and
25 Robert Borski. And in that letter, it stated that

—

2 they're working to secure \$300,000 for relocation of
3 residents in Feltonville.

4 Now, we talked to Mr. John Kromer and --

5 COUNCILMAN ORTIZ: What was that?

6 MS. RIVERA: \$300,000 for the relocation
7 of residents and \$250,000 for the City for the
8 purpose of demolition; this was for the Feltonville
9 area.

10 COUNCILMAN ORTIZ: So what you're
11 telling me is that your solution to the problem is,
12 one, to relocate them and to tear down their
13 buildings.

14 MS. RIVERA: No, that's not what the
15 letter is stating. If necessary to do a demolition,
16 that would be L&I's call.

17 COUNCILMAN ORTIZ: But that's not what
18 -- see, this sentence says that the City, through
19 the Office of Housing and Community Development and
20 the Mayor's Office, is preparing an application to
21 obtain federal funding which will be dedicated for
22 Feltonville residents. It is not saying, "We have
23 received a letter from Congressman Brady that was
24 directed to you, the Council Committee on Public
25 Safety." That's not what that sentence says.

3 language. But that sentence says you are preparing
4 an application. Where is the application? what does
5 it contain? what does it do?

6 MS. RIVERA: We spoke with Mr. Kromer
7 yesterday and --

8 COUNCILMAN ORTIZ: Is it tear down or is
9 it to relocate or what? Or is it to rebuild?
10 That's what it should be going towards. It should
11 be going towards rebuilding.

12 See how we can maintain this
13 neighborhood that is a good neighborhood and not
14 create new empty lots in North Philadelphia. We
15 have enough empty lots in North Philadelphia.

16 MR. SOLVIBILE: Councilman, part of the
17 effort in the letter, I believe, is a effort to stem
18 the problem until a cure can be found.

19 COUNCILMAN ORTIZ: But tell me, tell me
20 how it is that you're going to stem the problem. It
21 doesn't say anything about that, it doesn't say
22 we're trying to stem the problem. All that says is
23 that you're going to distribute homeowners'
24 maintenance handbooks. These people know how to
25 maintain their homes.

3 suggesting that -- Councilman, Councilman, we're not
4 suggesting that they don't.

5 COUNCILMAN ORTIZ: It aggravates me
6 because that's what you said last time.

7 MR. SOLVIBILE: But, but --

8 AUDIENCE MEMBER: We don't need a
9 handbook.

10 COUNCILMAN ORTIZ: They need -- they
11 have houses in which they raised their children.
12 Some of those kids are going to college. We're
13 giving them -- we're giving some of those kids a
14 very bad example of a civics lesson. They have not
15 failed the City; the City's failing them.

16 They want something from you that says,
17 People, we're not going to put you into homeless
18 shelters. The answer is not going to be a Section 8
19 voucher so that you can go to a neighborhood where
20 nobody wants you, okay?

21 They want to know that they have
22 invested their lives' savings in these houses, in
23 these homes. They have raised their kids in these
24 houses, those homes. That's what we want our city
25 to look like. And they're black, they're Puerto

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2 Rican, they're white, Irish, Italian. That's what
3 Philadelphia is.

4 And you're telling me after a month that
5 what you have is this, after a month.

6 They need answers. And let me tell you
7 something, if I have to spend the summer calling you
8 back through July, through August, that's what we'll
9 do, that's what we'll do, 'cause you need to sit
10 down with them, you need to be consulting them, you
11 need to talking to them, and not just to remove them
12 from their neighborhood, not just to tear down their
13 houses. That is not the solution that I'm seeking.

14 Councilman, go ahead.

15 COUNCILMAN RIZZO: I guess I'll direct
16 this to Mr. Solvibile.

17 I understood that the Administration was
18 developing a plan -- and this may have already been
19 addressed, I was a few minutes late -- that I
20 believe Joyce Wilkerson indicated that there was a
21 plan being developed to address this issue citywide.
22 Could you comment on that?

23 MR. SOLVIBILE: I -- the plan for
24 Feltonville would be the same plan that's citywide
25 at the present time. And whatever is gleaned from

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2 what we can do in Feltonville will be done citywide,
3 not just in Feltonville.

4 COUNCILMAN RIZZ0: But what's the status
5 of this plan?

6 MR. SOLVIBILE: It's still being looked
7 at. The Chief of Staff is going to meet with
8 Dr. Spirn to go over ways that the City can
9 investigate federal, State, and City monies and the
10 monies available in the field for these types of
11 problems and how to solve 'em, and in general, just
12 do the best we can to come up with a plan that could
13 -- it is everybody's desire to keep people in their
14 homes. That's -- the object is not to tear down
15 buildings but to try to keep the people in their
16 homes.

17 COUNCILMAN RIZZ0: But I also believe
18 that the City Administration's position, even
19 without the plan, is that they can't involve
20 themselves in subsession [sic] programs when they
21 just can't -- the spin is that it just would
22 bankrupt the City if the City stepped forward to
23 help these folks, to help the people up on --

24 MR. SOLVIBILE: Councilman, I'm not
25 aware of what the Mayor or the Chief of Staff or the

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2 Administration is talking about or doing in that
3 regard, I've not been a part of that conversation,
4 so I cannot speak on what you just asked.

5 COUNCILMAN RIZZO: Okay. Well, when do
6 you think this plan going to -- when do you think
7 we'll be seeing the draft report or this plan on how
8 they plan to approach this issue citywide in an
9 effort to be fair?

10 MR. SOLVIBILE: I'm told maybe six to
11 eight weeks -- more like eight weeks, eight to ten
12 weeks would be a realistic goal as to when we could
13 have a plan that would -- that people could debate
14 and discuss and that we could have meaningful
15 dialogue about.

16 COUNCILMAN RIZZO: Are members of
17 Council a part of this?

18 MR. SOLVIBILE: I -- I -- no.

19 COUNCILMAN RIZZO: No?

20 MR. SOLVIBILE: No, sir.

21 COUNCILMAN ORTIZ: Thank you.

22 Thank you, Councilman.

23 So you are going to involve the
24 community, you're going to let us know when you're
25 sending this application to OHCD. That is -- that

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2 is not what -- this is not Bob Brady's letter,
3 that's not what Bob Brady is talking about in his
4 letter.

5 So six to eight weeks, right? What is
6 six to eight weeks, what date?

7 MR. SOLVIBILE: I -- Councilman, I said
8 it would be more like eight weeks, eight to ten
9 weeks.

10 COUNCILMAN ORTIZ: Eight to ten weeks,
11 eight to ten weeks. That's September?

12 MR. SOLVIBILE: We should have it by
13 then, Councilman.

14 COUNCILMAN ORTIZ: Is that what you're
15 talking about, September?

16 MR. SOLVIBILE: Late August to
17 September, yes, Councilman.

18 COUNCILMAN ORTIZ: And -- and --

19 AUDIENCE MEMBER: What year?

20 MR. SOLVIBILE: The year 2001.

21 COUNCILMAN ORTIZ: And if we say you're
22 going to come before this committee and you're going
23 to have something more substantive than this and
24 it's not just going to be about demolition, right?
25 Is that it?

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2 MR. SOLVIBILE: Yeah, I -- we'll --

3 MS. RIVERA: Yes.

4 MR. SOLVIBILE: We have not been
5 discussing demolition in the Feltonville area at

6 all. We've been discussing --

7 COUNCILMAN ORTIZ: I understand that.
8 All I'm asking is when you're going to come back
9 here.

10 MR. SOLVIBILE: Yes. We're not coming
11 back with a demolition plan.

12 MS. RIVERA: No.

13 MR. SOLVIBILE: No, we will not come
14 back with a demolition plan. It's a plan to have
15 people be --

16 COUNCILMAN ORTIZ: Because I thought --
17 I thought that NTI was about recovering
18 neighborhoods but also saving those neighborhoods
19 that we can save. And this is a salvageable
20 neighborhood.

21 MR. SOLVIBILE: And I agree.

22 COUNCILMAN ORTIZ: And we should have a
23 plan to salvage it.

24 MR. SOLVIBILE: And I agree.

25 COUNCILMAN ORTIZ: And we should let

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2 those people know what that plan is.

3 MR. SOLVIBILE: We can't have a plan
4 without the community involved; I agree, Councilman.

5 COUNCILMAN ORTIZ: Is that all you got?

6 MR. SOLVIBILE: Yes.

7 COUNCILMAN ORTIZ: Councilman Clarke, do
8 you have a statement, question? Councilman Clarke.

9 COUNCILMAN CLARKE: Thank you,
10 Mr. Chairman. Good afternoon.

11 I want to ask you questions since we've
12 now established that sometime in early September,
13 late August, we may get a written report from the
14 Administration. In the interim, is there a
15 potential that we know of at this point of any of
16 the properties in the targeted area being
17 structurally unsound, imminently dangerous? And if
18 in fact if they are, is there an interim strategy
19 associated with any -- unfortunately, any relocation
20 activities in the short term?

21 MR. SOLVIBILE: We have made inspections
22 in the 300 block of Raymond Street in the
23 Feltonville area, and we have inspected a whole
24 block and put crack-monitoring systems in place on
25 the block. It's a little bit different in the back

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2 alleys -- there's like -- it goes down a little bit
3 and we had, and we had a truck to come up higher.
4 And we then take the crack monitoring and we can go
5 back and determine if there's any movement, which is
6 a way of instead of using a guesstimate with your

7 eye to determine movement, we have a monitoring
8 system.

9 At the present time, we do not have
10 anyone living in an imminently dangerous building in
11 these areas. So, yes, we are monitoring and we will
12 continue to monitor the blocks, the various blocks
13 that we have concerns for.

14 COUNCILMAN CLARKE: Let me understand
15 what you're saying. You said on a particular block,
16 you do have systems in place that are monitoring any
17 foundation problems. I understand this is a ten
18 square block area that we're talking about?

19 MR. SOLVIBILE: It's several -- the Army
20 Corps of Engineers mentioned five streets, I
21 believe, five or six streets. And in the
22 Feltonville area right now, we do have two crack
23 monitoring systems on two different blocks in
24 Feltonville. And our inspectors preview or survey
25 the other blocks that were mentioned in the Army

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2 Corps of Engineers to determine if the buildings are
3 safe and if anybody would be in danger by continuing
4 to live in the properties.

5 COUNCILMAN CLARKE: Okay.

6 MR. SOLVIBILE: So we are on top of

7 that. I've ordered Dan Quinn, Unit of Contractual
8 Services to have an inspector go daily on every one
9 of the blocks in the area.

10 COUNCILMAN CLARKE: And if,
11 unfortunately, we do find something, do we have the
12 wherewithal within the budget to respond to it? I
13 know we've had several instances in the last couple
14 of years where we found that there were properties
15 that were either subsidence problems or problems
16 associated with prime builders to -- I mean, are we
17 budgeting that in anticipation of a problem, or will
18 we simply maybe have a problem and then not have the
19 wherewithal to resolve it? 'Cause Council, we will
20 obviously be in recess and I'm not sure we'll be
21 able to come back and provide a transfer ordinance
22 or anything of the like.

23 Have we built a cushion into our
24 budget?

25 MR. SOLVIBILE: What the City's response

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2 has been where we have liability, where we are
3 responsible or caused the problem, yes, there's
4 money in the budget for that. Where we are not
5 responsible, there's not necessarily money in the
6 budget. And we handle it on a case-by-case decision
7 as to how people would be helped.

8 COUNCILMAN CLARKE: So if something
9 happens, then we will come up with a strategy to get
10 the necessary resources to resolve that?

11 MR. SOLVIBILE: We would --

12 COUNCILMAN CLARKE: Is that what you're
13 saying?

14 MR. SOLVIBILE: Well, I guess what I'm
15 saying -- what I'm saying is that from my end of the
16 -- from my level of responsibility, my people would
17 make a determination of if the City is in any way
18 liable. If we feel we are, we bring Risk Management
19 into it; and if we feel we're not, we take guidance
20 from the Administration as to what's the proper
21 course or how to deal with the people.

22 My inspectors in my department always
23 try to keep in mind, you know, that we're dealing
24 with families and people just like us and fellow
25 citizens.

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2 COUNCILMAN CLARKE: All right, I
3 understand what you're saying with respects to the
4 liability issues, but at the end of the day, at some
5 point, it's the City's responsibility to respond to
6 a citizen's needs, even if we're liable or not.

7 I guess the question I need to ask you,

8 given the recent history of these types of problems
9 in the Logan area and, I believe, in Councilwoman
10 Krajewski's area and Councilman Nutter's area and
11 now in Councilwoman Donna Reed Miller's area, does
12 it make sense for us to have a budgeted amount that
13 would be able to respond to these issues regardless
14 as to whose problem it is?

15 Because it is becoming increasingly
16 clear to me that this is going to be beyond
17 Feltonville. And I think at some point as a city,
18 we need to take a proactive approach to this as
19 opposed to responding to these issues. And if
20 nothing happens, then great, but I don't understand
21 the strategy associated with just kind of waiting
22 until something happens.

23 COUNCILMAN ORTIZ: That's all we're
24 asking, for a strategy.

25 MR. SOLVIBILE: I can't see where that

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2 would hurt to sit down with Council and determine
3 what we could do besides where there's
4 non-liability. Where there's liability, there's no
5 problem.

6 (Unintelligible, parties talking over
7 each other.)

8 MR. SOLVIBILE: I'm saying it would be a

9 good idea, Councilman.

10 COUNCILMAN CLARKE: Mr. Solvibile, this
11 whole issue about liability versus non-liability, I
12 mean, whatever dollars we spend are taxpayers'
13 dollars, right, so it doesn't matter if they're
14 liable or not. I mean, at some point, we have to do
15 something because at the end of the day, it's going
16 to be taxpayers' dollars, whether or not we're
17 liable or not. So I don't think that we should
18 haggle over that particular issue, given the
19 significance and the nature of what we're
20 experiencing now.

21 I think that we probably need to come up
22 with a proactive program to address these. We know
23 that this is going to continue to happen. I mean, I
24 understand you obviously in your position can't say
25 that here today, but it is clear to me that there

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2 are other areas in the City of Philadelphia where at
3 some point in time, we're going to have these
4 similar problems, and I just think that, you know,
5 for us not to address it proactively doesn't make
6 much sense as a government.

7 So, you know, I really encourage you.

8 MR. SOLVIBILE: It never hurt to be

9 prepared, Councilman.

10 COUNCILMAN CLARKE: I encourage you
11 absolutely.

12 Thank you.

13 COUNCILMAN ORTIZ: Councilman, that's
14 what more or less asked for the last time. We said,
15 Give us a plan that begins addressing the problems
16 here and addresses the problem long-range.

17 There is a Sinking Home Task Force,
18 isn't there?

19 MR. SOLVIBILE: Yes.

20 COUNCILMAN ORTIZ: Are any residents
21 members of that? Who makes up the Sinking Home Task
22 Force?

23 MR. SOLVIBILE: Mayor Rendell appointed
24 a group of people to it at the end of his
25 administration.

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2 COUNCILMAN ORTIZ: Who's that?

3 MR. SOLVIBILE: Myself, Risk Management,
4 Water -- L&I, Risk Management, and Water
5 Department. And am I missing anyone? And the
6 Capital Program Office.

7 COUNCILMAN ORTIZ: When was the last
8 time you met?

9 MR. SOLVIBILE: A month ago?
10 MS. RIVERA: Yeah, about a month ago.
11 MR. SOLVIBILE: About a month ago,
12 Councilman.
13 COUNCILMAN ORTIZ: About a month ago.
14 MR. SOLVIBILE: Yes, sir.
15 COUNCILMAN ORTIZ: How many times have
16 you met in the year?
17 MR. SOLVIBILE: I'm sorry, and Chief of
18 Staff's Office is involved also.
19 COUNCILMAN ORTIZ: How many times have
20 you met in this year?
21 MR. SOLVIBILE: About three times, maybe
22 four, but three for sure. I might have missed one
23 of the meetings.
24 COUNCILMAN ORTIZ: So you met prior to
25 our last hearing, right?

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2 MR. SOLVIBILE: Yes, sir. And prior to
3 even -- I mean, we've met several times this last
4 year.
5 COUNCILMAN ORTIZ: Councilman Cohen.
6 COUNCILMAN COHEN: I thought I was
7 getting things clear until you talked about how we
8 have enough funding if the City is liable. What do
9 you mean, if the City is liable?

10 MR. SOLVIBILE: If a trash truck would
11 hit a building and create a dangerous condition and
12 we had to bring the family out. Accidents or damage
13 caused to property by City employees or the City of
14 Philadelphia.

15 That is basically what I mean,
16 Councilman.

17 COUNCILMAN COHEN: And do you have
18 evidence that that's going to appear here?

19 MR. SOLVIBILE: Pardon me, sir?

20 COUNCILMAN COHEN: And do you have any
21 evidence that that's going to be a factor here?

22 MR. SOLVIBILE: No, none at all.

23 COUNCILMAN COHEN: None at all. That's
24 what I thought.

25 From your point of view, from the point

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2 of view of this committee, is it a City problem if
3 there is -- if we are unable to show that a problem
4 exists along the line you indicated. You're
5 indicating that the City can take care of the
6 finances if the City has a liability, and then
7 you've given us a very narrow definition of
8 liability, which you indicate does not exist to your
9 knowledge anywhere. I take it from that that there

10 is a likelihood that the City's going to wind up
11 saying: Legally, we have no liability. Does that
12 mean there is no City problem?

13 MR. SOLVIBILE: I'm not a lawyer, so I
14 can't answer what the City would say legally,
15 Councilman, but the City has a problem and the
16 citizens have a problem.

17 COUNCILMAN COHEN: Right.

18 MR. SOLVIBILE: But the responsibility
19 on how to -- or a better word is -- how to cure the
20 problem is a better way to approach the equation,
21 how can we cure the problem. And I don't know the
22 answer to that. I don't know -- it's not a City
23 problem exclusively; it's a State and federal
24 problem.

25 COUNCILMAN ORTIZ: Councilman, I don't

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2 think Mr. Solvibile can give us an answer to that.

3 COUNCILMAN COHEN: No, but I want
4 Mr. Solvibile to know that this committee believes
5 that it is a City problem whether or not there is
6 technically City liability. And it's to that City
7 problem that exists whenever its citizens have
8 problems that makes it a City problem.

9 And what we're looking for is a plan to
10 deal with a City problem, whether or not there is

11 technically any City liability or not in the
12 judgment of the City.

13 MR. SOLVIBILE: I understand that, and I
14 said, if the City -- you know, if a citizen in the
15 City has a problem, the City has a problem.

16 COUNCILMAN COHEN: Right.

17 MR. SOLVIBILE: I understand that too,
18 Councilman. I was just giving you an answer as far
19 as the Councilman's question regarding funds
20 available for emergencies.

21 COUNCILMAN COHEN: And you're saying
22 that as of now, there is no City funds available
23 unless there is a legal determination that the
24 defects were caused by the City.

25 MR. SOLVIBILE: I -- I -- yes.

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2 COUNCILMAN COHEN: Is that right?

3 MR. SOLVIBILE: Our answer to the
4 Councilman was that, yes.

5 COUNCILMAN COHEN: So that you're
6 telling us that currently, there no plan to provide
7 funds if the citizens have a problem as
8 distinguished from the City being at fault somehow
9 and causing that problem to exist.

10 MR. SOLVIBILE: No, I didn't go into

11 plans. I said funds available for a catastrophe
12 caused by the City. That's as far as my answer and
13 only on that level. I did not speak for anyone else
14 other than when Diana and I gave that answer, it was
15 based upon the funds available, and that's what the
16 Councilman asked, and that's all the question was
17 about, what would be done, just with what funds were
18 available.

19 COUNCILMAN COHEN: Is your committee
20 capable of producing a program where the citizens
21 have a problem without respect to whether or not
22 there technically is found to be City fault?

23 MR. SOLVIBILE: And that, I believe, is
24 what the State, federal, and City government has to
25 come up with.

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2 COUNCILMAN COHEN: Well, who's going to
3 do that? Who's going to consider all of those
4 factors?

5 MR. SOLVIBILE: The administration.

6 COUNCILMAN COHEN: And does your
7 committee represent the Administration? In that
8 point, do you have the authority to do that?

9 MR. SOLVIBILE: We make recommendations
10 to -- the Mayor's Chief of Staff office is on the
11 committee.

12 AUDIENCE MEMBER: Excuse me, okay, we're
13 tired of hearing this, okay? We want answers. We
14 are going to the Mayor's Office. Thank you.

15 (Feltonville residents in attendance
16 leave chambers.)

17 (Witness comes forward.)

18 MR. SOLVIBILE: Councilman? John
19 Christmas.

20 MR. CHRISTMAS: Good afternoon,
21 Councilman. I'm John Christmas from the Chief of
22 Staff's Office.

23 The Administration had hoped to present
24 the testimony of Professor Spirn today to speak on
25 the Feltonville and general subsidence issues. If

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2 presented with an opportunity to do so, we would --
3 COUNCILMAN ORTIZ: You know, I would
4 like -- this is what I would like, because I think
5 I've read about Dr. Spirn and her expertise. I
6 would rather that she sit down with you and go over
7 the area, study the place, do the stuff that needs
8 to be done, tell us what her perception is, because
9 we know that there is subsidence problems across the
10 City and we need to get a comprehensive answer. I
11 understand that. But we have an imminent problem in

12 Feltonville that the City has to begin answering to.

13 And I would rather -- because in her
14 testimony, I know she speaks to the general
15 problem. You're not Dr. Spirn, right? So I would
16 rather -- because we've heard testimony about
17 subsidence and what it does and what it causes, and
18 we understand that in Philadelphia, we have a very
19 specific problem as to that.

20 I would rather that when she comes to
21 testify to this Council that she testify as to
22 Philadelphia and our problem and what her
23 recommendations are and what the City and the
24 Administration is planning to do short-term in terms
25 of Feltonville and long-term in terms of other

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2 areas.

3 MR. CHRISTMAS: Councilman, Professor
4 Spirn has considerable experience actually with
5 Philadelphia and has been working in the Mill Creek
6 area on the buried flood plains issue there. And in
7 addition to that, I think that Professor Spirn did
8 provide some research and material in the Task Force
9 report.

10 COUNCILMAN ORTIZ: Mrs. Spirn, why don't
11 you just grab the microphone and identify yourself
12 for the record, please. I like to be courteous, I'd

13 like to give you all the privileges and courtesies
14 that we as a body give people. We've had other
15 people from Boston come here and not get good
16 treatment, and I don't want you to go through the
17 same process.

18 PROFESSOR SPIRN: Thank you.

19 COUNCILMAN ORTIZ: So could you tell us
20 what the story of the process of your testimony is.

21 PROFESSOR SPIRN: I'm Anne Spirn. I'm
22 currently a professor at MIT, but only since last
23 September. Prior to that, I was a professor at the
24 University of Pennsylvania, and I've been working
25 for the past few years at --

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2 COUNCILMAN ORTIZ: So you're one of
3 ours.

4 PROFESSOR SPIRN: I'm definitely.

5 COUNCILMAN ORTIZ: So you're rooting for
6 the Sixers, right?

7 PROFESSOR SPIRN: Absolutely. Wouldn't
8 should know it, the year that we move away, both the
9 Phillies and the Sixers pick up their games.

10 I've been working for the past 15 years
11 with West Philadelphia, and specifically since 1995
12 with the Mill Creek neighborhood. And my experience

13 about this issue, which is a national issue, of
14 buried flood plains is grounded here in Philadelphia
15 and through observations in other cities which I've
16 visited, but my most intimate knowledge is here and
17 specifically with West Philadelphia.

18 COUNCILMAN ORTIZ: Well, I would like
19 you to be helpful to us and come back when we
20 develop this report on Feltonville.

21 Blondell, do you have some questions to
22 any of the panel?

23 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: Yes.

24 COUNCILMAN ORTIZ: Okay.

25 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: I simply want to

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2 underscore the comments raised by Councilman Darrell
3 Clarke in that a strategy is not only proactive, but
4 a comprehensive strategy clearly is important
5 because there are a number of neighborhoods now
6 potentially or currently being impacted by this.

7 And I wanted to respond to a couple of
8 comments made in your testimony, Miss Rivera, and
9 you state that at the present, the City is committed
10 to do the following, so I wanted some additional
11 detail.

12 MS. RIVERA: Mm-hmm.

13 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: Where are you --

14 where is the City with regards to a process or
15 procedure where you're currently investigating all
16 complaints?

17 MS. RIVERA: We're doing that now.

18 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: So that's in
19 place?

20 MS. RIVERA: Yes.

21 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: Should I assume,
22 then, by the bullets that you have here that all of
23 these practices are currently in place or not?

24 MS. RIVERA: Well, the homeowner's
25 manual has not been distributed yet.

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2 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: Okay. And the
3 Distressed Properties Hotline?

4 MS. RIVERA: That's been in effect since
5 October 2000.

6 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: Okay. And you
7 spoke to the their bullet.

8 MS. RIVERA: Right. And we're currently
9 working with the authorities and other City
10 agencies.

11 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: Is that a part of
12 the mission of the Tack Force?

13 MS. RIVERA: Yes, yes.

14 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: Where is the Task
15 Force with regards to the last bullet, which speaks
16 to coordination with State and federal agencies?
17 Has any contact or dialogue been had with regards to
18 those other important --

19 MS. RIVERA: As of today, no.

20 MR. CHRISTMAS: Councilwoman Blondell
21 Reynolds Brown, this is John Christmas.

22 Actually, through OHCD, the City has
23 applied for money that was made available by Senator
24 Santorum and perhaps others, Congressman Brady with
25 respect to Logan.

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2 As far as -- naturally, we want to try
3 to receive money from whatever sources with respect
4 to Feltonville. And based on the Army Corps of
5 Engineers report, we understand Feltonville to be at
6 least as big as the Logan area and impacting at
7 least as many homes as the Logan subsidence issues.

8 So, yes, we are speaking to Congressman
9 Brady's office, we are coordinating through OHCD to
10 drawn down money that they made available. I think
11 to date, they say -- in a new correspondence that
12 came May 9th, I think it was when we were previously
13 -- I think we might have been scheduled for -- this
14 hearing was actually continued from May 10th. On

15 May 9th, Senator Santorum and Congressman Brady made
16 available an additional \$550,000. I think it was to
17 relocate people, and also, they provided money for
18 demolition.

19 While we're very obviously interested in
20 drawing down that money, without a comprehensive
21 plan, \$550,000 is immaterial to the overall problems
22 in Feltonville. But, yes, we are talking to them.

23 COUNCILMAN ORTIZ: But that's money for
24 relocation and demolition.

25 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: Is that so?

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2 MR. CHRISTMAS: Yeah, that's what their
3 letter says, that it's for relocation and
4 demolition, but there is no relocation plan.

5 There's a huge problem with the
6 Feltonville issue. The big problem is that --

7 COUNCILMAN ORTIZ: They're real
8 families.

9 MR. CHRISTMAS: Well, there's that.

10 But in addition to that is they, as I
11 understand it, want a commitment from the City now,
12 before they will allow City inspectors to go in to
13 determine whether the particular property is safe or
14 not. I mean, correct me if I'm wrong, but that's

15 been my --

16 COUNCILMAN ORTIZ: That's not true. The
17 City has an ongoing duty to be able to go in, and if
18 there's any danger, imminent danger, to go in
19 whether the family wants it or not, okay?

20 What they have is that they -- they
21 don't see the City functioning and developing
22 because they still believe, and Mr. Solvibile has
23 said that they're not that many homes in imminent
24 danger there.

25 And what we're looking at is how do you

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2 save a neighborhood before you destroy it? That's
3 what the City should be looking at. How do you save
4 a neighborhood before you destroy it? That's what
5 the City's vision and look should be towards.

6 MR. CHRISTMAS: Councilman?

7 COUNCILMAN ORTIZ: Yes.

8 MR. CHRISTMAS: That is our --

9 COUNCILMAN ORTIZ: No, it doesn't seem
10 to be, because all you're talking to me about is
11 drawing down money for relocation and demolition,
12 and you're not drawing up a plan for saving
13 Feltonville.

14 MR. CHRISTMAS: Councilman, I -- my
15 statement was that the letter that came from

16 Congressman Brady and the letter that came from
17 Councilman --

18 COUNCILMAN ORTIZ: Excuse me a second.
19 You are the executive branch -- not Brady, not
20 Santorum. You're supposed to be telling them what
21 it is we need. You're supposed to be telling them
22 what we need.

23 REVEREND KIRK: Thank you, Councilman.

24 COUNCILMAN ORTIZ: Not getting a letter
25 from them. And I appreciate their efforts because

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2 they're doing perhaps what you should be doing.
3 It's writing proposals and say we got a neighborhood
4 that is salvageable. How can you help us salvage
5 this neighborhood? We have a problem in
6 subsidence. What do we need to be able to fix that
7 problem in that neighborhood before we have to
8 destroy the houses, before we have to remove the
9 people? That's the question that you should be
10 asking.

11 And I don't hear that from you. All I
12 hear is demolition and relocation.

13 REVEREND KIRK: It's Logan all over
14 again, Councilman.

15 COUNCILMAN ORTIZ: Logan all over again.

16 Another desert, another pasture. We should be going
17 into the cattle business and put in some grass seeds
18 and put in some cattle and we would have an economic
19 development project.

20 Feltonville is salvageable. That's what
21 you should be directing your direction and your
22 vision towards. It is a working-class
23 neighborhood. They have mortgages, they have
24 responsibilities. If we have to demolish and
25 relocate them, we send them into the poorhouse, we

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2 send them into the shelters. That's not what a city
3 should be looking towards, a development plan.

4 This is recessed until September 18th at
5 1 o'clock.

6 (Adjourned 2:10 p.m.)

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I HEREBY CERTIFY that the foregoing

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proceedings of the Council of the City of

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Philadelphia of Tuesday, 6/12/01, 2001, were

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reported fully and accurately by me, and that this

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is a correct transcript of same.

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RE: COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY

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RES. NO. 010175

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JOSEPHINE CARDILLO,

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Registered Professional Reporter

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