

COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA
COMMITTEE ON PARKS, RECREATION AND
CULTURAL AFFAIRS

Room 400, City Hall
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Thursday, August 16, 2012
9:30 a.m.

PRESENT:

COUNCILWOMAN CINDY BASS, CHAIR
COUNCILWOMAN JANNIE BLACKWELL
COUNCILMAN W. WILSON GOODE, JR.
COUNCILMAN BOBBY HENON
COUNCILMAN CURTIS JONES, JR.
COUNCILMAN DENNIS O'BRIEN
COUNCILMAN DAVID OH
COUNCILWOMAN MARIA D. QUINONES-SANCHEZ
COUNCILMAN MARK SQUILLA

Council's Committee on Parks, Recreation, and
Cultural Affairs will hold a hearing to
discuss the safety of the City's recreation
centers and parks in light of recent violent
crimes that have taken place therein.

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COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Good

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morning. We're going to go ahead and get

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started now.

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Good morning, everyone. Thank

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you so much for being here this morning.

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My name is Cindy Bass and I'm the Chair

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of the Parks and Recreation Committee for

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City Council, and what we're having today

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is a special public hearing.

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And can we have our Clerk

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please read the title of the hearing

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notice.

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THE CLERK: The Committee on

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Parks, Recreation, and Cultural Affairs

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of the Council of the City of

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Philadelphia is holding a special public

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hearing on Thursday, August the 16th,

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2012 from 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. in Room

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400, City Hall to hear testimony on the

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issue of violence in the City's parks and

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public recreation facilities.

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COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Thank you

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so much.

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I do want to take a moment and

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2 acknowledge my colleagues who are here:
3 Councilwoman Jannie Blackwell, Councilman
4 Denny O'Brien, Councilman David Oh, and
5 Councilman Mark Squilla. I want to thank
6 them all for being here today during the
7 special session. And I'd like to take a
8 brief moment and read an opening
9 statement that was prepared for this very
10 important gathering today, and from
11 there, what we'll do is accept any other
12 opening statements from the members of
13 Council and then open it up for the
14 public testimony.

15 And, once again, I want to
16 thank everyone for being here today, and
17 by being here, your presence, you affirm
18 your commitment to the City of
19 Philadelphia's parks and recreation
20 system. Today's hearing is to discuss a
21 number of critical issues that we face in
22 that very system.

23 Philadelphia has over 4,100
24 acres of parkland, 184 recreation centers
25 and playgrounds, and overall, we do an

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2 outstanding job of managing a complex
3 system and infrastructure during these
4 challenging times.

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6 Last weekend, I attended the
7 championship game for the Danny Rumph
8 Basketball Tournament at the recreation
9 center named for him, which borders the
10 Mount Airy and Germantown neighborhoods
11 of the 8th District. This annual
12 five-day tournament usually attracts well
13 over 5,000 spectators, 90 percent of whom
14 are from Philadelphia. It is a widely
15 known event, promoted by word of mouth in
16 many different neighborhoods, highly
17 respected, and it is important to know
18 that thus far, it has been drama free and
operating for well over seven years.

19

20 The fact that we can have such
21 a successful event organized by the
22 families and members of this community
23 and without a violent incident tells us
24 that it is more than just a possibility;
it has been a reality for many years now.

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And yet we have seen the other

1
2 end of that spectrum, which includes the
3 recent violence that is threatening our
4 ability to enjoy these amenities - three
5 shootings at Wister Playground last week,
6 two shootings the week before at a North
7 Philadelphia playground, a rape at Myers
8 Recreation Center in Southwest
9 Philadelphia, and a homicide at the
10 Parkside-Evans Recreation Center less
11 than 48 hours ago. According to press
12 reports, a 37-year-old man was found on a
13 grassy patch between the swings and the
14 basketball court.

15 Are these unusual occurrences
16 or is this a disturbing trend or
17 somewhere in between?

18 We know that for some of our
19 City's children, our recreation centers
20 are their only outlet, particularly in
21 the warm weather months. There are no
22 vacations and no day trips. And for
23 families that are barely holding on, our
24 recreation centers must be safe, clean,
25 and accessible. Furthermore, abandoned

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playgrounds become vessels for more crime, a place to do drugs, prostitution, and other things that a playground is not meant for. Playgrounds become abandoned by people being afraid to use them.

These are the questions we are here to ask today as we begin what we hope will be a continuing discussion into what has happened and the development of both short- and long-term planning to proactively address this issue.

The purpose of this hearing is threefold. We want to hear from our parks and recreation professionals. They know the system best, what works, what doesn't. They know the people in the neighborhood, on the ground that are most affected by these serious incidents, and they know what the needs are.

I want to give a special thanks to Michael DiBerardinis, Deputy Mayor for Parks and Recreation, and Sue Slawson, who have been great partners to work with.

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We want to hear from our police professionals and understand their perspective. What can Council do to help? We cannot diminish what they know and are able to share. As first responders, we want to ask for their theories as to why some rec centers are incident free and others seem to be a constant source of unproductive and possible illegal activity.

We want to hear from the neighbors of these centers and their thoughts on how to make our centers more family friendly and more of an amenity, which is what many people thought they were getting when they decided to move into a particular neighborhood.

I also want to make it clear from the very onset, this is not a budget hearing, nor is the purpose to rehash a budget that was passed into law earlier this summer. The sole purpose of this hearing is to address public safety.

And with that, we're going to

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2 begin our public -- or actually we're
3 going to begin with statements from my
4 colleagues.

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6 Councilwoman Blackwell, we'll
7 start with you, if you'd like to make a
8 statement.

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10 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
11 you, Madam Chairwoman.

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13 Good morning. It is certainly
14 a pleasure to be here. I'll have to step
15 out a little while and come back, but let
16 me say the Recreation Department, albeit
17 we have issues in our City everywhere
18 unfortunately with crime and public
19 safety, they're just absolutely
20 wonderful. And we've come a long way in
21 our city and our park system, and
22 certainly we thank Mike DiBerardinis and
23 Sue Slawson for all that they do. And
24 Deputy Commissioner Kevin Bethel came out
25 of West Philadelphia. So that may be
26 good or bad for him, because I call him
27 every day. And certainly we thank our
28 Police Department for what they do and

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2 all who are here. It's a great park
3 system. So we hope to keep it all in
4 perspective. We can always make life
5 better, but we want to say thank you for
6 all that we have and all that we do.

7

Thank you, Madam Chair.

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COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Thank you.

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Councilman O'Brien.

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COUNCILMAN O'BRIEN: Thank you,
11 Madam Chair. I want to thank you for
12 bringing attention to this important
13 quality of life issue. I would like to
14 just echo some of the statements that
15 Councilwoman Blackwell said and just be
16 as brief as I possibly can.

17

There was a time when we had
18 700 park guards. This is an issue that
19 isn't just about the Department of Rec
20 buildings and the acres and amenities
21 that are present in our neighborhood.
22 This happens everywhere. And I'd just
23 like to say in the Northeast where I
24 live, often people think that nothing
25 happens up there. Well, my son's friend

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2 left my house the other night and had a
3 knife put in his face and was told to
4 surrender everything he had. At the same
5 time, another neighbor and his two
6 friends were accosted by a group of
7 individuals who all had knives and asked
8 them to surrender everything. There was
9 an altercation. The kid was beaten up.
10 Ironically, both of these individuals,
11 their parents are Philadelphia police
12 officers. This happened houses away from
13 where I live. So it is a concern and can
14 happen everywhere.

15 Over the years when I was a
16 State Rep in Northeast Philly, we had
17 measured responses, but different
18 responses. You have to mix up, I think,
19 the protocols that we use. At first we
20 used Fairmount Park. We used the mounted
21 patrols, and they would go down into the
22 woods and chase the guys. And so after a
23 couple weeks, the kids in the woods got
24 smarter. They put thin wire from one
25 tree to another, so that either the neck

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2 of the horse would be slashed or the
3 police officer would.

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5 Then we used the drug
6 forfeiture cars and the guys in Narcotics
7 to drive around in their suped-up Vettes
8 and their street clothes with their beads
9 and long hair. Well, pretty soon those
10 guys on the street started to recognize,
11 Well, these are old guys trying to look
12 young. So that only lasted for a short
13 period of time.

14 Then we bought dirt bikes, and
15 we recognized that sight lines are
16 important, so when the patrol cars go by,
17 you can see what's going on in the
18 recesses of whatever public properties or
19 private properties we have.

20 The dirt bikes became a
21 wonderful useful tool, but the eyes and
22 ears of the community and their
23 involvement in what's going on is also of
24 paramount importance.

25 I want to thank Cindy Bass for
bringing this conversation together,

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2 because we have to reinforce that the
3 community has a role, but we also have to
4 look and -- it's not a budget issue, but
5 we have to look at how we're spending our
6 resources. We have to be active
7 listeners in the community so that we
8 understand each neighborhood is
9 different, and the responses have to be
10 several and they have to be random, but
11 they have to be consistent.

12 So there are a number of
13 opportunities we have, but the reality
14 is, the City is changing before our eyes
15 and we have to look more comprehensively
16 as how we look at these issues, because
17 these are the issues that escalate and
18 that are on the nightly news.

19 So I want to thank -- I'll be
20 very brief, and I'll be glad to be an
21 active listener from this point forward
22 in this hearing.

23 Thank you.

24 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Thank you,
25 Councilman.

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And also I do want to
acknowledge we've been joined by
Councilwoman Maria Quinones-Sanchez.

Would you like to make an
opening statement?

COUNCILWOMAN SANCHEZ: No.

COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Councilman
Oh.

COUNCILMAN OH: No. That's
fine.

COUNCILWOMAN BASS: And
Councilman Squilla.

COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Thank you,
Chairwoman.

I just want to thank
Councilwoman Bass for bringing this to
our attention and to the City's
attention, and to realize that we do have
a great Recreation Department, great
leadership. We also have a great Police
Department with great leadership. And in
order to make this happen, we need to
work together, with us, the
Administration, Council, and all the

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2 departments throughout the City in order
3 to make it safe again, whether we need
4 the police surveillance cameras, whether
5 we need more protection in the
6 playgrounds, whether we need more
7 workers. Whatever it is that we need to
8 come up with from these hearings, I think
9 we have to do it together.

10 And I want to thank you,
11 Councilwoman Bass, for having this,
12 because it's an important step to get to
13 that process. So thank you.

14 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Thank you.
15 Thank you for being here.

16 And with that, we're going to
17 start with our witness list, and actually
18 first we're going to have Mr. Michael
19 DiBerardinis, who is the Deputy Mayor for
20 Parks and Recreation, and also Sue
21 Slawson, Susan Slawson, if you would join
22 him as well.

23 (Witnesses approached witness
24 table.)

25 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Good

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2 morning.

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DEPUTY MAYOR DiBERARDINIS:

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Good morning, Councilwoman Bass and

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members of the Committee. My name is

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Michael DiBerardinis, Deputy Mayor for

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Environmental and Community Resources and

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Commissioner of Parks and Recreation.

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With me today is Susan Slawson, First

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Deputy Commissioner of Recreation and

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Programs.

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I appear before you today to

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present testimony on the issue of

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violence at City parks and recreation

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facilities. Across the parks and

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recreation system, people of all ages are

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enjoying thousands of high-quality

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programs occurring at over 160 recreation

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facilities, hundreds of our neighborhood

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parks, and our large watershed parks that

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span across Philadelphia. This summer

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alone, over 9,000 young people will

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participate in our summer neighborhood

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camps at 129 recreation facilities, and

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over 250 programs will take place at our

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2 neighborhood parks. These include summer
3 festivals, movies, even Shakespeare in
4 the park.

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In addition, we will project
well over one million people will visit
our public swimming pools this season,
and Parks and Recreation will coordinate
over 60 athletic leagues for teens and
young adults.

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As a department, Parks and
Recreation takes the security and safety
of citizens and our staff very seriously.
We are continually mindful and planning
and acting in collaboration with other
City departments and the community for
the safety of our staff and our users.
While more work can be done in these
areas, we appreciate this opportunity to
discuss our recent improvements and
initiatives to improve safety.

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We are deeply saddened and
outraged by the sexual assault of the
young lady that took place at F.J. Myers
Recreation Center on the evening of July

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2 16th. Despite the presence of staff,
3 along with volunteers, adult volunteers,
4 and staff, a terrible crime was
5 perpetrated. Staff, center volunteers,
6 and community residents work with police
7 who apprehended the suspect in just a
8 matter of days.

9 My department, working with the
10 community and other City departments,
11 intends to take the following steps to
12 prevent a similar incident in the future.
13 We will continue with the installation of
14 security cameras at F.J. Myers Recreation
15 Center and 30 other recreation centers
16 across the Parks and Recreation system.
17 We are funding this initiative with our
18 own capital dollars and also in working
19 with District Councilmembers using their
20 capital allocations as well. Seven
21 facilities already have security cameras.

22 Also, we are working with the
23 Office of Risk Management, Licenses and
24 Inspections, and the Police Department to
25 conduct indoor and outdoor survey of all

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2 our large centers to identify unsafe and
3 isolated locations. These areas will be
4 locked or off limits whenever possible.
5 Deputy Commissioner Susan Slawson is
6 leading that effort and will be complete
7 in just a matter of a few weeks.

8

 While existing resources --
9 with existing resources and engaging with
10 the community and other City departments,
11 primarily the Police Department, we have
12 instituted several improvements and
13 initiatives focused on our staff and
14 program centers and recreation
15 facilities. It is at these facilities
16 where we think we can have the greatest
17 impact.

18

 Coming out of our department's
19 merger engagement process and after some
20 violent incidents last summer, we have
21 deepened our relationship with the Police
22 Department to have an ongoing presence at
23 our recreation centers, our swimming
24 pools, and at our adult leagues across
25 our system. And I will explain a little

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2 bit about that.

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Last summer, there were several gun-related incidents around young adult basketball leagues which called for changes in the management of these leagues. This year, Parks and Recreation instituted a new adult basketball league policy for our 60 leagues that creates greater accountability for the league organizers and participants and also elevates our level of cooperation with the Police Department. These combined actions have resulted in zero incidents to date and significantly reduced negative behaviors associated with these leagues.

The Police Department continues to assist at our swimming pools throughout the City, but they have also heightened their presence at recreation facilities and park areas where we have jointly identified as priority sites. Our public pools are a summer tradition and one of the most popular spots for

1
2 children and families. In fact, last
3 pool season, over one million people
4 visited our pools, and we are on pace to
5 easily surpass the one million visits of
6 last season. Given the popularity of our
7 pools, planning for their safe use
8 requires a collaborative approach.

9 Working with the Police Department, we
10 have identified 52 priority public pools
11 where the police officer is present and
12 in contact with Park and Rec staff.

13 In addition, all 70 of our
14 swimming pools are staffed overnight to
15 prevent vandalism and ensure safety.
16 This pool season we have employed almost
17 800 lifeguards and pool maintenance
18 attendants. Even with increasing visits
19 to our public pools, we are proud to
20 report that there has been no major
21 incidents of violence during the past two
22 pool seasons. Park and Rec staff and the
23 community are working together to keep
24 our public swimming pools safe for all.

25 We are working together with

1
2 other City departments and community on
3 addressing the problem of ATVs and
4 off-road vehicles that cause so much
5 damage to our park and recreation
6 facilities and create unsafe conditions
7 for citizens. Earlier this spring, the
8 Police Department seized several illegal
9 ATVs and dirt bikes from the Tacony Creek
10 area. More recently, the Department
11 seized 26 illegal ATVs and 11 dirt bikes
12 in various neighborhoods. We will
13 continue to work with the police and
14 others to step up similar efforts.

15 We also have been effective in
16 increasing security in a number of our
17 neighborhood parks through the work of
18 our Tree Unit, along with our Tree
19 Keepers, who have pruned trees and
20 cleared areas around existing lighting
21 and to improve connections and sight
22 lines.

23 In addition, the Parks and
24 Recreation Commission has spent the last
25 year having their bimonthly meetings at

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2 various park and recreation facilities
3 and surveying community members about
4 their safety concerns. They have also
5 been studying best practices in urban
6 parks around the country. The Commission
7 will publish a report on its findings and
8 host a workshop to develop solutions to
9 safety and security challenges this
10 October. And we would be happy to invite
11 interested Councilmembers to participate
12 in this workshop.

13 With its hundreds of recreation
14 facilities and over 10,000 acres of
15 parkland woven throughout the City of
16 Philadelphia, my department is deeply
17 committed to the citizens and the
18 communities we serve, from school-aged
19 participants to our senior participants
20 who inhabit every neighborhood throughout
21 the City. It is of the utmost importance
22 to the Department that citizens and staff
23 are safe while enjoying our parks and
24 recreation facilities.

25 Thank you for this opportunity

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2 to discuss this important issue, and we
3 look forward to your questions.

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COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Thank you.

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Sue, anything?

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DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SLAWSON:

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No. I think Deputy Mayor has pretty much
8 summarized what we're doing, but I am
9 open for questions.

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COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Okay.

11

Well, let me first start by saying thank
12 you so much for your testimony. I think
13 that it's important that the public know
14 exactly what proactive steps are being
15 taken by the Department to make sure that
16 we can get in front of this issue and
17 whatever it is that we can do. We want
18 to be supportive of you in all of your
19 efforts.

20

Can you talk a little bit

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further about the security cameras and
22 their impact and what sort of suggested
23 impact you think they'll have.

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DEPUTY MAYOR DiBERARDINIS:

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Yes. During the merger process, this

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2 question of safety was an overwhelming
3 concern of both the staff and the
4 citizens that we spoke to. And we spoke
5 to thousands of both -- or hundreds of
6 both. Our response, our early
7 response -- and this goes back almost two
8 years ago. We, out of our capital
9 dollars, appropriated a few hundred
10 thousand dollars to move cameras in our
11 large, multi-story, older centers, most
12 of them older centers. We had some
13 preliminary success at a few centers,
14 Vare Center in particular in Fox Chase,
15 with security cameras where both our
16 staff and our advisory council leadership
17 and our users said it is -- they made a
18 big difference as a crime prevention
19 tool.

20 It took a little convincing to
21 get me there, but after we heard that
22 testimony from both staff and advisory
23 council members, we put a significant
24 investment in putting security cameras
25 in, beginning with our larger, older

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2 facilities. And I think we'll be at
3 about somewhere in the next few months,
4 we will begin the installation of many of
5 these cameras. I think most of them will
6 be put in in September and October.

7

8 We're working with District
9 Councilpeople as well to analyze their
10 centers of concern and to leverage our
11 dollars and -- our limited capital
12 dollars and your limited capital dollars
13 to do more of these where we think the
14 need is.

15

16 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Okay. And
17 can you give me an idea of the cost of
18 the investment to date, would you say?

19

20 DEPUTY MAYOR DiBERARDINIS:
21 Well, again, I'm going to pull this out
22 of my head. I should know this, but I
23 was going to say 300. Susan says it's
24 closer to \$375,000.

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26 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: So between
27 3 and 400,000.

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29 DEPUTY MAYOR DiBERARDINIS:
30 Yeah.

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2 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Okay. And
3 how many centers has that covered?

4 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SLAWSON:
5 It covers 30 of our facilities.

6 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Three?

7 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SLAWSON:
8 Yes.

9 DEPUTY MAYOR DiBERARDINIS:
10 Thirty.

11 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SLAWSON:
12 Thirty.

13 DEPUTY MAYOR DiBERARDINIS:
14 Thirty, 3-0.

15 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Any other
16 questions?

17 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Just on
18 the surveillance camera project, are they
19 going to be recorded like on a cloud that
20 can be viewed or is it something that is
21 just done at the site?

22 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SLAWSON:
23 Well, they're going to be done at the
24 site. We will be able to go back and
25 pull the tapes, but we're talking

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2 additional funding when we're talking
3 about connecting them with the Police
4 Department and having another company
5 that monitors. That takes the price --
6 probably doubles the price. So we will
7 not be able to say that it's going to a
8 source that's monitoring our facilities
9 24/7, but we will be able to pull the
10 tapes and view if something has happened
11 in our facilities.

12 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: So each
13 site has a separate recording device and
14 is monitored?

15 DEPUTY MAYOR DiBERARDINIS:
16 Exactly. So they can be monitored at
17 times. It won't be monitored all the
18 time, but there will be some realtime
19 monitoring, and then there'll be the
20 tapes as well.

21 COUNCILMAN OH: Just to follow
22 up on Councilman Squilla's question, and
23 really two parts. That's about \$12,500
24 per center. There's 30 centers, 12,500.
25 And then there's the cameras, which are

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2 not monitored and, therefore, it can only
3 record, and I understand that it has been
4 shown to your satisfaction it actually
5 deters crime. But two considerations is
6 the 12,500 -- and I'm just asking the
7 question, so please let me know. Would
8 it be -- what's the consideration on
9 spending it for security personnel of
10 some sort in terms of part time or
11 whatever?

12 And the second thing is,
13 applications or designing apps that
14 instead of being monitored by a human
15 being would detect certain types of
16 visible things, digital cameras, that
17 would then alert someone to take a look
18 at it.

19 DEPUTY MAYOR DiBERARDINIS:
20 Well, just to try to answer the first
21 question. First of all, I think the cost
22 is more than that, because that's our
23 investment. The Council investment adds
24 on to our investment. So the cost per
25 system is more than 12,500. I can get

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2 you those numbers. I don't have them in
3 my head.

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5 Number two is, if we were going
6 to hire security, it's a recurring annual
7 cost, just as -- the cameras are a
8 one-time investment. They're a capital
9 investment, and they last for a very long
10 time. If we were to put a couple hundred
11 grand -- we can't use the capital money
12 for staff for this reason. And the
13 recurring cost of a significant security
14 investment I think would be a lot of
15 money.

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16 So the third question, I'm not
17 sure I know about this technology. So
18 maybe Susan.

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19 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SLAWSON:

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20 No, no. I actually wasn't clear on that
21 third question.

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22 COUNCILMAN OH: Just like voice
23 recognition or visibility recognition on
24 smart phones and on computers, different
25 apps are created. And actually I had a
26 visitor from Temple University the other

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2 day, and they would love to work with any
3 City department or public entity to
4 provide all their creative and innovative
5 persons to address those type of things.
6 But I just wonder that there aren't
7 applications that could be developed that
8 follow certain patterns that identify
9 that could just alert someone to take a
10 look when they fit certain patterns of
11 visibility. We have that technology now,
12 and I just wondered that they wouldn't be
13 able to provide for free as a service to
14 the City an application that might
15 identify those type of things.

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DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SLAWSON:

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18 So I just want to kind of clarify what
19 I'm hearing. So you're suggesting that
20 we have possible interns come in and work
21 with our staff with our computer system
22 to develop --

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24 COUNCILMAN OH: What I will do
25 later is, I'll provide an introduction to
this professor and his entire apps and
maps team that does this for private and

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2 public entities right here in
3 Philadelphia.

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DEPUTY MAYOR DiBERARDINIS:

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Thank you. We'll certainly be interested
6 in understanding more about that.

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COUNCILMAN OH: Okay. Thank

8

you very much.

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COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Very good.

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Thank you. Thank you, Councilman.

11

Before I acknowledge

12

Councilmember Maria Quinones-Sanchez, I

13

do want to acknowledge that we've been

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joined by Councilman Bobby Henon. Thank

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you for coming.

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Councilwoman.

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COUNCILWOMAN SANCHEZ: Good

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morning. Let's talk a little bit about

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our public safety strategy at the rec

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centers and our public facilities. You

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talked about the police presence. Are we

22

now -- do we now have a protocol? Are

23

they signing in the logs? Can we verify

24

how many times police come into the

25

centers, those types of things? Because

1

2 I know last year we started. It kind of
3 fell apart. And I know in certain
4 centers we made more commitment with some
5 of our captains. How is that working?

6

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SLAWSON:

7

8 It's actually working really well. I
9 want to say we, I want to say, May, end
10 of April, we met with Deputy
11 Commissioners Bethel and Wright and the
12 command staff and we gave them a list of
13 facilities, and we actually asked them to
14 cover all of our facilities with just a
15 log. So we provide the log. And they've
16 been coming around, and we're able to
17 pull that log. And the locations where
18 they're not showing up, I'm in constant
19 contact with both the deputies, letting
20 them know if we think that there's not
21 enough coverage.

21

22 So it's been working really
23 well, and I think that has a lot to do
24 with the fact that we didn't have a whole
25 host of issues at our facilities that we
had last season. So that's been working

1

2 well. We can monitor how many times they
3 actually come into the facility, as well
4 as our pools. Not only do we have them
5 assigned to some of our pools that we
6 know may be possible problems, they also
7 come and they check the pools three,
8 four, five times a day. A couple of our
9 pools we have them assigned overnight,
10 because we realize that there are issues
11 at some of our pools and they are -- with
12 a cost, mind you, but we're willing to
13 pay to ensure the safety of not only our
14 staff but the community members.

15 COUNCILWOMAN SANCHEZ: So how
16 much do we currently spend for those
17 folks who are overnight at the pools? I
18 don't think most folks understand the
19 type of investment that goes to the
20 24-hour operation of a pool.

21 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SLAWSON:
22 I'll have to get that number to you
23 because I don't know it off the top of my
24 head and I don't want to give you a
25 number that's incorrect.

1

2

COUNCILWOMAN SANCHEZ: We'd be

3

interested, and I think for the record

4

for the Chair to look at all of the line

5

items that contribute to part of the

6

public safety strategy. I think that's

7

important, because they come from

8

different pockets. We don't always pull

9

them all together and say, Okay, in

10

addition to what could be -- probably

11

will end up being close to half a million

12

dollars in cameras, what are the

13

overnight staff for the pools, all those

14

types of things to prevent some of the

15

vandalism that we see. Because then that

16

gives you a better picture of all the

17

different things that we're trying to do,

18

particular in some of these facilities

19

with crime.

20

In terms of long term, have we

21

looked at where we have some of those

22

dead spaces in the rec centers

23

repurposing some of those centers to

24

limit those, particularly those old, old

25

rec centers? I mean, what are we doing

1
2 internally to kind of close out those
3 places, maybe use them as storage as
4 opposed to some of the -- outside of the
5 stairways obviously that are safety
6 issues.

7 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SLAWSON:
8 After the incident at Francis Myers on
9 July the 16th, I met with someone from
10 L&I, the Police Department, and Risk
11 Management, and we came up with -- they
12 actually had a form that we could use to
13 go out and do an assessment of our
14 facilities to identify those vulnerable
15 places in our facilities. Francis Myers
16 just happens to be 50-plus years old, an
17 old orphanage. We had a floor that we
18 were not using.

19 And so we came up with this
20 assessment, and they came out to 25 of
21 our facilities to determine where we
22 could block off, where those vulnerable
23 places are, and we're coming up with an
24 assessment now to see what resources and
25 how we can actually close off various

1

2 floors. And we chose those multi floors,
3 old facilities that we're not using
4 floors, we're not using certain spaces.
5 And so we have to identify them. And so
6 we've done that, and now it's just a
7 matter of assessing that data and
8 deciding how we can, with our resources,
9 close off third floors, and if we're not
10 using basements, make sure they're
11 locked.

12 But it was important for us to
13 have L&I there, because we didn't want to
14 lock and close off doors that we were
15 actually -- would be compliant with what
16 L&I's codes were. So we're just waiting
17 now to pull all that data together, and
18 we'll be able to present that to you
19 within the next three weeks.

20 COUNCILWOMAN SANCHEZ: Okay.

21 Thank you.

22 Thank you, Madam Chair.

23 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Very good.

24 Additional questions,

25 Councilman?

1

2

COUNCILMAN O'BRIEN:

3

Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner, I'm

4

impressed with the list of activities

5

that you have at the rec centers, and it

6

seems to me that the important element of

7

that is that the activities probably

8

cease in and around 9:30 at night when

9

all the bad activities start to begin.

10

Again, I think that the rec centers can

11

provide a wonderful opportunity. You

12

have all those activities. People feel

13

more comfortable reporting bad things

14

that are happening in their neighborhood

15

or things that they see from 9:30 until 2

16

o'clock in the morning at a rec center

17

rather than a police station, because of

18

the intimidation factors. If I walk into

19

a police station, everybody is going to

20

say, You're the person that reported this

21

illegal or dangerous activity.

22

Again, I'll go back to a story

23

that happened a couple years ago where an

24

individual had a knife and went after

25

somebody at the Chalfont Playground in

1
2 Northeast Philly. Well, the rec center
3 leader got together with the town watch
4 and Calvary Athletic Association, and
5 instantly they put together a very
6 aggressive town watch. They took all the
7 people from those organizations, took
8 their picnic tables, their beach chairs,
9 their lawn chairs, and they took over the
10 rec center and all Calvary Athletic
11 Association's ball fields and they
12 established a presence there and they
13 said, Guess what? We're going to be
14 here, so don't come back here. That
15 doesn't mean that they're not going to
16 move to some other place, but I think the
17 real key issue is, how do we have
18 presence in those specific hours when
19 these activities are going to take place.
20 And I think that's a community issue
21 that's an opportunity for you and Recs
22 and Parks to help the community assemble
23 that kind of strategy, strategic
24 information that's important, but I also
25 believe that we have to beef up the

1

2 police patrols and we have to exact a
3 consequence from the courts.

4

5 There was -- and, again, if I
6 can just be indulged for one second.

7

8 Right after I got elected, I met with 60
9 businesses in Northeast Philadelphia, and
10 they had what was called the cash

11

12 register bandit, went up and down
13 Roosevelt Boulevard and robbed 50 or 60
14 businesses, until he was caught. I

15

16 suggested that they go down and sit in
17 that courtroom in front of the judge and
18 say, You know what? Any time that

19

20 there's an incident like this, we're not
21 only going to try to attack it in the
22 community, we're going to sit in the

23

24 courtroom and we're going to listen to
25 how the judge responds to someone who is
26 a chronic multiple dangerous offender.

27

28 So that also speaks to the
29 community that something can be done,
30 that they can take ownership, that they
31 can be part of the dialogue.

32

33 I think you have a critical

1

2 role, and you've established your
3 presence in the community up until 9:30
4 at night. There's other forces that are
5 beyond your control at 9:30 at night, but
6 I think your friendly presence and your
7 steady presence in the community can add
8 a great deal. Not to the enforcement
9 process, but to the strategic
10 identification as to how we appropriate
11 those critical resources, the scarce
12 resources that we have.

13

Thank you, Madam Chairman.

14

COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Thank you.

15

16 With no additional questions, I
17 just want to thank you for being here
18 this morning. I know that you have a
19 very busy schedule and at some point
20 you're going to have to leave us. So
21 thank you so much for being here.

22

DEPUTY MAYOR DiBERARDINIS:

23

Thank you, Councilwoman.

24

COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Thank you.

25

And next we're going to ask to
come forward from the Philadelphia --

1

2 actually, from the Office of Public
3 Safety, Mr. Michael Resnick, Esquire.
4 And joining him are Deputy Commissioner
5 Wilson and Deputy Commissioner Bethel.
6 Thank you so much for being here this
7 morning, gentlemen.

8 (Witnesses approached witness
9 table.)

10 MR. RESNICK: Good morning,
11 Councilwoman Bass and members of the
12 Committee. My name is Michael Resnick.
13 I'm Director of Public Safety. With me
14 is Deputy Commissioner Wright and Deputy
15 Commissioner Bethel, the Deputy
16 Commissioners for the Regional Operation
17 Command, North and South.

18 I think what we're seeing in
19 our rec centers, in our parks is just a
20 microcosm of what's going on in the City
21 in general. We're seeing an uptick in
22 violence in the City, so naturally we're
23 seeing an uptick in violence, I believe,
24 in our park areas.

25 Let me give you an overview of

1

2 what we're doing in the City generally as
3 our crime-fighting strategy, and then
4 we'll talk about some specifics with
5 respect to the park.

6

7 Our approach to violence in the
8 City generally: We've implemented and
9 we're running our GunStat program, which
10 is a combined effort with the
11 Philadelphia Police Department and our
12 District Attorney. We coordinate our
13 enforcement and our prosecution resources
14 in specific areas of the City that we've
15 targeted as being highest volume in terms
16 of violence and shootings and assaults.

17

18 Also, we have instituted
19 Operation Pressure Point again with our
20 law enforcement partners in the City and
21 other agencies. We've implemented the
22 Violent Crime Reduction Partnership with
23 our federal partners, which you've
24 probably heard about recently when the
25 Attorney General was in the City.

26

27 We've increased the number of
28 officers on the street. We've graduated

1
2 close to 100 police officers since the
3 beginning of the spring. We've augmented
4 our force over the weekends and holidays
5 during the summer with the use of
6 overtime. Thanks to the efforts of our
7 District Attorney, we've sought higher
8 bails and longer sentences for gun
9 crimes, and we're seeing the results of
10 that in the expanded numbers of
11 individuals held in our prison system on
12 gun charges. There's approximately 300
13 more people in prison this year than last
14 year on gun charges.

15 We've implemented several tip
16 lines since January 12th, roughly January
17 12th. We've received 6,500 tips on those
18 tip lines. We have texted tip. We have
19 e-mail. We have phone. We have
20 implemented very robust methods for which
21 people can give us information. And
22 people seem to be using those lines. As
23 I said, we've had 6,500 tips since
24 they've started in the beginning of the
25 year.

1
2 We've implemented a reward
3 system - \$20,000 for information leading
4 to the arrest and conviction of an
5 individual committing a homicide, \$500
6 for information leading to a conviction
7 of an individual possessing an illegal
8 gun.

9 Not only are we working with
10 prosecution and enforcement, but we're
11 also working with crime prevention
12 strategies. We have the Mayor's Office
13 of Reentry, which helps ex-offenders find
14 jobs, find housing, get the services they
15 need to hopefully reduce recidivism. We
16 have YVRP that works with the youth in
17 certain neighborhoods who are prone to
18 being involved in shootings or likely to
19 be shot. We have town watch. And I see
20 Mr. Murphy is in the room. We also have
21 our PSA meetings, which is when the
22 lieutenant in charge of a particular PSA,
23 a police service area in a district,
24 meets with the community and discusses
25 the needs of that community, what are the

1

2 problems in that community. We also have
3 our Philly Rising program, which goes
4 into neighborhoods and asks the neighbors
5 what did they need to make the
6 neighborhood better, and we will provide
7 the City services.

8

Specifically with Parks and
9 Rec, as Deputy Mayor DiBerardinis stated,
10 the Philadelphia Police Department and
11 the Parks and Rec Department have
12 developed a very close working
13 relationship. As Mike D stated, we've
14 assisted in the security audit of rec
15 facilities. Police officers and others
16 have gone to certain rec centers, walked
17 around the facility, and participated in
18 that security audit.

19

We have uniform officers
20 present at priority pool locations. We
21 have police officers involved in league
22 games. We have police officers coming to
23 the rec centers and signing the logs,
24 signing in.

25

I just want to underscore what

1

2 Mike said, that last year and this year
3 we have over a million visitors to the
4 pools, and there were no major incidents.
5 Also, there have been no violent
6 incidents this year at the leagues, and I
7 think that's as a result of the
8 implementation of the new policy where we
9 have officers showing up.

10 One of the things we've started
11 this year, as Commissioner Slawson
12 stated, was, we have safety meetings. We
13 meet with Parks and Rec. We meet with
14 the commanders. And they tell us what
15 are the locations that they're having
16 problems with, and we try to deploy our
17 resources. I mean, we're trying to be
18 strategic in these times of limited
19 resources. So we don't have enough money
20 and enough people to put a police officer
21 in every single rec center, but if they
22 meet with us and they tell us where they
23 think the problems are, where they're
24 going to maybe have league activities
25 that may result in some conflict between

1

2 factions, we'll be there and we'll have
3 officers there.

4

5 So obviously any incident of
6 violence at rec centers or any of our
7 parks is intolerable, and we will try to
8 work as closely as we can with Parks and
9 Rec to alleviate and solve some of those
10 problems.

11

12 I'd just like to say that I
13 think based upon what we've been doing
14 and what we've seen in terms of the
15 results, I think the answer is, we need
16 to work closer and to build in the
17 collaboration that we've already begun
18 and deploy our resources in a strategic
19 manner where they tell us they have the
20 problems.

21

22 I would also like to see, as
23 Councilman -- who said it? O'Brien,
24 Councilman O'Brien said, folks in the
25 communities where these rec centers are
need to get involved to an extent like he
talked about. I mean, we can get people
involved in town watch in the areas where

1

2 these centers are and in the after hours
3 or the off hours. The folks that are
4 involved in the community town watches
5 come and be our eyes and ears.

6

7 Also, the neighbors that are
8 involved or live in the areas where these
9 centers are, I would like to see more
10 turnout at the PSA meetings to meet with
11 the police officials in those areas. I
12 would love to see more people getting the
13 "I Watch Philly" app on their smart
14 phones or knowing what the numbers for
15 our texted tip lines are and sending us
16 more information. And perhaps Council
17 can help us out, put that information on
18 your individual websites, remind the
19 neighbors and the folks at the community
20 meetings that you go to that we have
21 those tools available for their use and
22 just help us spread the word to get that
23 out there.

24

25 We're available for any
26 questions that you may have, but that
27 would conclude my comments.

1

2

COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Thank you

3

so much.

4

Any additional comments? No?

5

Okay.

6

Thank you so much for your

7

commentary. And I just have a couple of

8

questions.

9

I want to acknowledge that

10

we've been joined by our Majority Leader,

11

Councilman Curtis Jones Jr., and I know

12

he wants to make an opening statement as

13

well, but before we actually go to that,

14

a couple of things.

15

Have we looked at an analysis

16

in terms of the effect that -- having the

17

close working relationship that you

18

describe with the Parks and Rec

19

Department, have we looked at sort of

20

like before what were some of the

21

numbers, some of the things that were

22

happening and what's happening now? So

23

before we had a sign-in log at a

24

particularly troubling recreation center,

25

what was happening and what's happening

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2 now?

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MR. RESNICK: Yeah. I mean, the data is collected. We obviously look at the data on a daily basis. We look at a lot of data on a daily basis, but we have not yet gone back to say, In these particular areas that you've identified for us as hot spots, what did the activity look like prior to us having our meeting and coordinating our efforts. We have not done that yet, but I think that that is something that we definitely will be doing. And we just implemented that earlier in the spring. I think maybe March or April we started to have those meetings. So it's a little early yet. I'd like to see maybe the full -- maybe at the end of the summer season take a look to see how our strategic deployment and our coordinated efforts have had an effect.

COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Very good.

And also I just wanted to make a note. If you could get us the

1

2 information in terms of making sure folks
3 have the information to text --

4

MR. RESNICK: Definitely.

5

COUNCILWOMAN BASS: -- and also
6 e-mail to make sure that all of Council
7 has that, because I know I don't have
8 that information.

9

MR. RESNICK: I will provide to
10 the Council President's office all of our
11 different venues by which individuals can
12 send us information and ask that he
13 disseminate it to every Councilmember.
14 And I would ask that each one of you put
15 it in your offices, get it out into the
16 community, ask folks to remember those
17 numbers, to save them on their phones.
18 If they see something, they can send us
19 information anonymously.

20

COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Absolutely.
21 We want to get that information out.

22

And so I think that's pretty
23 much it for right now. And I know that
24 Councilman Jones has a couple of things
25 that he would like to add, but before

1

2 that, I also wanted to correct, I
3 mispronounced the Deputy Commissioner's
4 name and I mispronounced it. And it's
5 Commissioner Wright. So I apologize.

6

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER WRIGHT:

7

I've been called worse. That's fine.

8

COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Not by me.

9

Councilman.

10

COUNCILMAN JONES: Good morning
11 and thank you, Madam Chair, for convening
12 this important hearing. And I see such
13 representation here that the myth of the
14 non-working Councilmen should be
15 dispelled forever, because I see a good
16 representation.

17

COUNCILMAN HENON: Ever.

18

COUNCILMAN JONES: Ever.

19

Let me just say that -- and I
20 had an opportunity to sit with the
21 Chairwoman to talk about these hearings
22 and want to dispel a couple of things.
23 That this is not a "gotcha" moment where
24 we say, Oh, look what's not happening,
25 what's not being provided in our parks

1

2 and recreation. We wouldn't do that.

3 But what we are concerned about is the

4 mobility and shifting locations of crime.

5 The topic is public safety in

6 our parks and rec, but that is a result

7 of an overriding problem that our city

8 faces, that our communities face. But

9 what is particularly disturbing to the

10 Chairwoman and members of this Committee

11 is that it's happening in the places, the

12 sanctuaries where our kids and mothers

13 and fathers believe there are safe

14 havens.

15 For me in my district and many

16 districts like it, the closest to Disney

17 World as many of our citizens are going

18 to get is in our parks and in our

19 recreation.

20 Recently I had the sad duty of

21 taking the new police captain around to a

22 number of sites in the 19th, and one of

23 them was 53rd and Parkside at the Evans

24 Recreation Center where the gentleman was

25 murder number 222, I believe it was, day

1

2 before yesterday.

3

4 So we are having a situation
5 where people are bringing their children
6 to parks and rec and having to witness
7 some of the ugly side of urban living.

7

8 And so what kind of went
9 through our heads was, A, the what,
10 where, who, when of any crime is
11 important, but particularly the where in
12 the instances of recreation centers.

12

13 I understand that we have heard
14 that you're underfunded and personnel is
15 down, and that's a result of a shrinking
16 economy and a shrinking tax base, but
17 what we hope to do out of this and out of
18 these hearings is come up with creative
19 solutions that invoke partnerships that
20 are maybe not traditional.

20

21 We have people that I know are
22 here to testify about horsemen, cowboys
23 that are willing to ride the parks and
24 help keep us safe. We have people that
25 we've talked to from the biking community
26 that are willing to do a town watch

1

2 style.

3

4 The other creative solution
5 that I hope to hear is that there are a
6 number of clubs, whether it's track and
7 field, whether it's basketball leagues,
8 that would love to be partners. Now, the
9 challenge is that our Commissioner can't
10 just let anybody in and that they have to
11 be vetted and that they have to be
12 certified in a way that makes sure that
13 our kids are safe even from coaches,
14 because there's a lot of that going
15 around.

16

17 But the idea is for us to
18 collectively -- and I, again, applaud our
19 Chairperson for shining the spotlight on
20 this. But I don't want you or anyone to
21 think that it is not in a spirit of
22 partnership and cooperation, and I hope
23 that's the reflection of all members of
24 this body.

25

26 So I wanted to say that. And I
27 look forward to hearing some of the
28 solutions that come from you and how we

1

2 can creatively approach this increasing
3 problem. And statistics may say that
4 it's not as pervasive as we might think,
5 but the headlines are suggesting that it
6 may be. So thank you.

7

MR. RESNICK: Councilman,
8 believe me, nobody feels got, and while
9 we appreciate the opportunity to come
10 here and explain to you all the efforts
11 that we're undertaking and I think some
12 of the good programs that we're working
13 on, we're smart, we have some smart
14 ideas, but we're open to every suggestion
15 that we could utilize to make the park
16 system, make the City safer. I mean,
17 it's reprehensible that there's violence
18 that occurs in our parks, in our rec
19 centers, as you said, where families and
20 children go for a respite.

21

22

23

24

25

COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Thank you.

Thank you, Councilman.

And Councilwoman

Quinones-Sanchez.

COUNCILWOMAN SANCHEZ: Thank

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2 you.

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I appreciate all the different mechanisms that we're using to get the citizenry to give us reports. I'm wondering, what is the protocol when you're getting some of these tips and how do residents know that their tips are not falling in a deep hole? What's going on? How is that information relayed back to captains? Is it shared at the PSAs? Is it reported on?

We have a lot of great people in the City who give us a lot of great information, and one of the frustrations I constantly hear is that since we increase people's abilities to communicate with us, how are we assuring them that there's a followup?

MR. RESNICK: Mechanically how it works, Councilwoman, is that the information that comes in goes to our Realtime Crime Center, and those detectives and officers that are assigned there receive that information by either

1

2 text or tip. They vet that information,
3 and then they assign it out to the
4 appropriate detective division from where
5 it came. So if a person comes in and
6 reports a crime, it will come to the
7 Realtime Crime Center, but depending on
8 the location of the crime that they're
9 reporting, it will go to that detective
10 division for those detectives to handle.

11 COUNCILWOMAN SANCHEZ: And then
12 how does that information get to the
13 captain and how do we make sure that --
14 for instance, one of my concerns is
15 sometimes we have multiple crimes.
16 There's a pattern developing, and we wait
17 too late to inform folks there's a
18 pattern here. So I'm wondering how we're
19 looking -- how this tip data is getting
20 to our captains and other folks to say,
21 Hey, there's been two people held up at
22 this bus stop in the last 72 hours. We
23 need to -- how do we relay that
24 information? I want to --

25

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER WRIGHT:

1

2 Good afternoon -- or good morning.

3

4 Every morning we have our crime
5 briefs with Commissioner Ramsey and the
6 other commanders. It's a fluid
7 operation. The Realtime Crime Center,
8 when they receive information, regardless
9 of the source, will send an e-mail to
10 every commander and PSA lieutenant as
11 well via their BlackBerry. So it's not
12 stale information. It's up-to-date
13 information. An example of that would be
14 last week 6100 -- I'm sorry; Walnut Lane,
15 Simons Playground, information was
16 received from a tip. We were able to
17 make two arrests with two males armed
18 with firearms. We had to chase them on
19 foot. But that's realtime information.

20

21 You talked earlier about PSA
22 meetings and information sharing. That
23 is our greatest success. Our greatest
24 tool is intelligence. We've come a long
25 way in the last four or five years with
26 the park security. We still have a long
27 way to go. But Commissioner Slawson and

1

2 Commissioner DiBerardinis as well as
3 Commissioner Bethel there, we meet
4 regularly. We speak on the phone on the
5 weekends about making sure that our parks
6 are safe.

7

8 For example, the sanctioned
9 basketball game, where we know there's
10 going to be a basketball game in a large
11 venue, we will cover that. We'll have an
12 officer assigned, make our presence
13 known. It's not just about sitting in
14 the car so you're seen; it's about
15 gathering intelligence, making contacts
16 with those responsible and the person in
charge of that game.

17

18 One of our weaknesses are those
19 pick-up games that we're not aware of
20 that may happen during the weeknight.
21 It's not on the schedule. The commanders
22 don't really know about it. That's why
23 it is imperative that our officers and
24 our PSA lieutenants are proactive, out
there looking at the games.

25

It's now part of our strategy.

1

2 We look at that, for example, as a
3 problem corner that we have that may be
4 known for drug sales. We also look at
5 the parks the same way now, because as
6 alluded to earlier, they are safe havens
7 for our children.

8

As a father of three daughters,
9 I use those parks. My children use those
10 parks. We have to do everything we can
11 to make them safe.

12

But information and
13 intelligence we get from the community is
14 where we've had our greatest success. We
15 just encourage everyone, if you see
16 something, to call 9-1-1, call the
17 captain, say something. Because that is
18 our greatest tool, is -- our weaknesses
19 are when we don't know. If we have some
20 insight and some intelligence about it,
21 whether it comes from the community or
22 ourselves, we've had some great success,
23 and we'll continue to do so.

24

COUNCILWOMAN SANCHEZ: And is
25 your data center collecting all of this

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2 information that we're going to be able
3 to look at?

4

5 One of the things obviously as
6 we await the cameras and some of the
7 other measures, for folks like me I'd
8 like to be able to look at what are the
9 reports coming in into an area. Is that
10 information going to be assessed rec
center by rec center?

11

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER WRIGHT: I
12 don't have that tangible information or
13 data present. I'm sure we have it. It's
14 stored. I can get that information.

15

MR. RESNICK: Our Mapping Unit,
16 depending on the location of the
17 incident, they'll assign location and
18 address, and then that's keyed into the
19 system, and our Mapping Unit assigns the
20 geographic code to it. So we keep that
21 information by location, and we can pull
22 it out by location.

23

COUNCILWOMAN SANCHEZ: So we
24 would be able to get that data from you
25 if we needed it, if we're in a particular

1

2 area in a particular region?

3

4 I mean, one of the reasons
5 9-1-1 becomes so important is, we can
6 track some of these calls. And I'm just
7 wondering as we increase the source of
8 how the information enters, are we going
9 to be able to capture that data?

10

11 MR. RESNICK: Sure. That
12 information is kept. The only -- I would
13 give you one caveat. If an incident were
14 to occur and the closest address or
15 closest location were a park or a rec
16 center but it didn't happen inside the
17 park or the rec center, you might see a
18 slight inflation of the incidents
19 occurring around that area, just because
20 that's the closest address we can assign
21 to where this incident occurred. So if
22 like a robbery occurs on the street,
23 knife-point robbery, gun-point robbery,
24 and the officers get there and they take
25 the report, they assign it at whatever
the address of the rec center is because
it's the closest sort of building. Then

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2 that's sort of tagged with that incident.

3 While it may not have occurred on the

4 property of the rec center, had nothing

5 to do with the rec center, it's just

6 geographically located close to it, so it

7 gets assigned to that location.

8 COUNCILWOMAN SANCHEZ: And for

9 us that becomes important information.

10 When we're looking at data, I'd like to

11 look at a couple of blocks around it,

12 because I think it puts it in a context

13 of what's going on. So it's not to -- I

14 don't want it to serve as punitive data

15 for the rec center. I want to know

16 what's going on around there, so what we

17 need to be doing around the rec center or

18 improve around the rec center. Thank

19 you.

20 Thank you, Madam Chair.

21 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Thank you,

22 Councilwoman.

23 And Councilman Henon.

24 COUNCILMAN HENON: Thank you,

25 Madam Chair.

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Good morning. I'm very pleased to hear about the collaboration between the Department of Rec and the Police Department. Especially as we move forward, the -- I guess they want to have the Council's involvement with part of the collaboration in dealing with the neighborhoods. I believe it is -- and data does speak volumes to the safety and the deployment of the officers in the hot spots.

You had spoken about the technology. I am a fan of technology and encourage everybody to use the apps that are available and the websites to notify the public on a lot of things that are going on, especially when it comes to public safety in our rec centers.

How do we -- how can we collaborate -- and I'll be interested, because I am working with the Department of Rec on a lot of the type of things that the Deputy Mayor was speaking about. How do we deal with, individual

1
2 Councilmembers, work together on trying
3 to get the message out, get the
4 availability of this technology to the
5 community groups and to the Department of
6 Recs? I don't think it would be a bad
7 idea to collectively go and set up
8 meetings in some of these hot spots and
9 some of these areas of which the
10 Councilmembers have concerns over for the
11 safety of our children, to have public
12 meetings or hearings in the rec centers
13 and show them the tools that are
14 available. And you've done a fine job in
15 getting some media attention and some of
16 the information out on the websites and
17 in the press, but we need to take it to
18 the people. And I think they'll use it.
19 I mean, when you're talking about young
20 children playing in the rec centers,
21 young children usually have young
22 parents. I mean, even though -- I'm a
23 little older and have some young kids,
24 but half of the folks have smart phones
25 nowadays and almost everybody texts, and

1

2 most everybody goes online and is willing
3 to explore and use the options that they
4 have available.

5

6 So I'd be interested in moving
7 forward taking advantage of that
8 collaboration in my district, and I'm
9 sure other members are willing to do the
10 same thing, letting them know. Because
11 I'll be the first to stand up and ask
12 everybody at these meetings moving
13 forward to use the social networking
14 aspect and the technology tools that are
15 available, because people will report
that right away.

16

17 MR. RESNICK: That was the
18 rationale behind the development of those
19 apps, Councilman, because we realize that
20 younger generations, that's how they're
21 communicating, with their thumbs. So
22 we've developed several applications.
23 And speaking for myself, and I'm sure
24 speaking for the Deputy Commissioners --
25 and I know Mr. Murphy is in the room --
we would be happy to come to any of your

1

2 community meetings, any District
3 Councilperson's community meeting, any
4 Councilperson's community meeting and
5 address folks and explain to them what we
6 have available, the tools that we have
7 available, how they're used, the fact
8 that they're anonymous. Anything that
9 you need from us to come out to assist to
10 explain to the community, how important
11 it is to get involved with town watch,
12 how important it is to come to the PSA
13 meetings, what goes on at those PSA
14 meetings, what you can accomplish there,
15 more than happy to come out and address
16 those concerns and advise and provide
17 that information to your constituents.

18 COUNCILMAN HENON: That sounds
19 great. Thank you.

20 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Thank you,
21 Councilman.

22 Councilman Oh.

23 COUNCILMAN OH: Thank you very
24 much.

25 Well, thank you for coming out

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to the Deputy Mayor DiBerardinis and
Commissioner Slawson and all of you.
It's a very difficult task that you have,
so important, and we do understand the
tremendous limitations that you're under.
And I just wanted to put in context -- my
questions relate particularly to me,
because I am thinking about the budget
and the appropriations and just the
challenges we have ahead of us. So I was
wondering within that context in regards
to Councilman Henon's question about the
technology that, as I had said earlier
during Deputy Mayor DiBerardinis's
testimony, that we have some excellent
resources here in the City, 85 colleges
and universities that do receive public
and private funding, and we are one of
the leading cities in the creative and
innovative technologies, particularly
around applications, and these entities
that are -- not just interns, but
actually entities of centers of
excellence, if you will, are very

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2 interested in partnering with the City.
3 And on that question of applications for
4 smart phones or other types of programs,
5 it would seem to me to be very possible
6 that a person who takes this application
7 could voluntarily allow for GPS to
8 identify where they are, fill in a
9 category; for example, City Councilman,
10 police officer, state trooper, assistant
11 district attorney, that when they send
12 the information or present in a community
13 group, it identifies kind of priority
14 code who you are. You know who they are.
15 In that sense, kind of vetting them, and
16 providing the cameras or whatnot to put
17 in the emergency or notifications to the
18 police. Police then having some method
19 of distribution.

20 So for me, I would think that
21 that would -- the technology aspect of it
22 would save us a lot of money, really
23 engage our citizens more.

24 So, again, I would love to make
25 an introduction to some of these centers

1

2 if they would like to come in and hear
3 from you, because that's -- they're
4 really looking to hear from the experts
5 on the ground, the people who deal with
6 the problems as to how to create these
7 applications. So that's one thing.

8

9 The second thing is then -- my
10 question is, despite the fact that crime
11 is moving around and all that type of
12 thing, I wonder are there identifiable
13 places that just have a history of
14 reoccurring crime over decades?
15 Sometimes there's less; sometimes there's
16 more. And the reason I wonder about
17 that -- and I think the answer would be
18 yes, but if it's no, I'd like to know --
19 that these places will tend to be, under
20 certain circumstances, places where even
21 if the crime is reduced, it will come
22 back. And even in dispersing some of
23 this crime, the question is, does it come
24 back to these areas and is there a police
25 technique that you're already using? I'm
just assuming you're already doing these

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2 things, but would you let me know?

3

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BETHEL:

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Councilman, I can't say there's any

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specific technique. I mean, some of

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these playgrounds or rec centers are in

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some of our toughest areas in the City.

8

And I think as what was expressed even in

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the paper today, when you bring those

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type of dynamics into any setting,

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whether it's on the corner or you bring

12

them into the playground where these

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large games are occurring or someone sees

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someone from last year who they have been

15

looking for, I mean, these guys sitting

16

there, they see people come and go. They

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make a phone call. Hey, listen, I see

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Mr. X. He's here now. I know you've

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been looking for him. So -- and that

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network goes through the community.

21

So we do put forth a lot of

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effort, as my partner said. I mean, we

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shift -- we have -- our school officers

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shift from the schools in the summer to

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the rec center and the pools.

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So we put a sustainable force into that area, but we're always going to deal with those dynamics. The incident at 52nd Street and Parkside, which Councilman Jones raised, I mean, there was no game. It rained. But these guys use these places to meet. And unfortunately as we try to be as many places as we can, we're always going to be faced with the challenge of -- the other day I came to Chew Playground. Two officers are sitting out in the ball field watching a basketball game to ensure the guys don't shoot each other, because we have such a heavy gang dynamic in that area.

And so we do put forth this effort, but guarantee, if my officers were to leave, whether it is to take a break or respond to a priority call, there is a great potential that something could happen in that time period. But through communicating and communicating with Sue Slawson and others, we've been

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2 able to try our best to be able to be as
3 many places as we can to show our
4 presence as much as possible.

5

6 But to your question, I cannot
7 rightfully say that no matter how much
8 force we put into those areas, those
9 variables always are dynamic. They
10 always can change and something can
11 happen.

12

13 MR. RESNICK: Just as an
14 example, Councilman, as we were talking
15 amongst ourselves earlier, on the 4th of
16 July at the Parkway, hundreds and
17 hundreds of police officers. Some idiot
18 pulled out a gun and started shooting. I
19 mean, there was a presence. There was a
20 uniform presence. There was an
21 overwhelming uniform presence. You just
22 can't account for that type of sort of
23 random violence and that type of
24 unpredictable behavior.

25

26 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER WRIGHT: I
27 want to add just one piece of
28 information. You talk about chronic

1
2 locations that have problems. East
3 Division, for example, I'll pick F and
4 Indiana, McPherson Square Park. It's
5 been a problem for years, drug dealers,
6 violence, prostitution, and crimes
7 against children. We recently tasked the
8 commanders of that division enough is
9 enough. They've come up with a
10 deployment strategy where there's
11 officers on foot and on bikes
12 specifically assigned to McPherson
13 Square. Captain Vogt of the 24th
14 District as well as Inspector Cochran are
15 also working with the community groups in
16 the area, Rock Ministries to name a few,
17 Impact Services, Councilwoman Quinones's
18 office, and we've had some great success
19 for the last several weeks. We've made
20 several arrests. We keep the park clear.

21 But arrest is not the answer
22 obviously. Those individuals that are
23 frequenting that park, a majority of them
24 need some kind of drug rehab and some
25 help, some employment. But our job is to

1

2 make it safe for everyone.

3

4 We made great strides over the
5 last several months. I can rattle off
6 the arresting activity in that park. It
7 would be astounding. But sustainability
8 is our challenge right now. With the
9 resources that we have and some of the
10 details and major events, sometimes the
11 officer is not always going to be able to
12 be there. That's why it's important that
13 the intelligence is leading us in the
14 right directions at the right times in a
15 timely fashion.

15

16 But right now this is a
17 long-term endeavor we're taking head on
18 for sustainability. They are not to
19 leave that area. I want to see how this
20 goes in the long term. Over the last
21 several months, I've seen great success.
22 And not only that, I'm getting some
23 positive e-mails and some correspondence
24 from members of that community, as well
25 as when you drive by, personal
26 observation. You can see the park is

1

2 cleaned up. You can see the kids are
3 playing. There's no more drug dealers on
4 the corner. People aren't sleeping on
5 the benches. That's because of the
6 police presence. But unfortunately, as
7 alluded to earlier, we could not be
8 everywhere all the time. But this is one
9 area that generated so many calls for us
10 on a regular basis that it was beneficial
11 to us to devote those resources
12 proactively as opposed to responding to
13 it later on.

14 COUNCILMAN OH: Thank you very
15 much. And I was up with Buddy Osborne
16 and Rock Ministries just a couple weeks
17 ago. They do a great job.

18 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Thank you.

19 And I want to take a moment now
20 and acknowledge that we've been joined by
21 Councilman Wilson Goode Jr. Thank you so
22 much for being here today, Councilman.

23 And Councilman Jones.

24 COUNCILMAN JONES: Thank you,
25 Madam Chair.

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A couple of questions. In 2009, I asked Commissioner Ramsey with the disbanding of the -- what is it, the 92nd Police District, which covered the park, was there an uptick, downtick, any variation in criminal activity in the parks. At that time, his response was that it was too early to tell.

Can I repeat the question again? You said statistics were very important. Do we have statistics to see whether there has been any change since we disbanded that particular district?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BETHEL: I would have to get that back to you, Councilman. I don't have any specific data to be able to demonstrate that to you right now. I would have to look at that and see if we can bring that together.

COUNCILMAN JONES: So --

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BETHEL: I mean, we're talking about -- again, we're talking about a small group of people

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2 that were disbanded and what they were
3 controlling. It wasn't a large -- I
4 forget the numbers, but -- I don't
5 remember the number, but I can't tell you
6 for sure. I don't want to say what their
7 numbers specifically were.

8

 COUNCILMAN JONES: Well, I
9 would like you to provide the Chair and
10 the Committee with that number and
11 whether from the time it was disbanded to
12 now, where and how many instances have
13 happened in the park. Shamoney Drive was
14 a very popular place for people to come
15 out and make out, but it was also a place
16 where bodies were being dragged out.

17

 So I need to know, and I would
18 think my colleagues would like to know
19 what has been the cause and effect of
20 that particular -- the idea was that
21 portions of the park would be covered by
22 respective districts like the 39th, which
23 covers part of the park, the 19th, I
24 would imagine the 35th and others, 14th.
25 So I want to see if that experiment --

1

2 what happened with it. Data-driven
3 information allows us to adequately
4 address budget issues and resources in a
5 way that is meaningful. So I need an
6 answer to the 2009 question what has been
7 the variance. That's number one.

8

 Number two, by way of data
9 driven, during this budget cycle, we
10 asked about the geography of crime. And
11 not so much in a scientific method in any
12 other way, other than the fact of where
13 and when a crime happens determines how
14 we might deploy things. We discovered in
15 the case of public schools that acts of
16 violence happen after people were let out
17 at different times, and one of the
18 solutions was to stagger the dismissal
19 time of some of the schools. So that
20 kind of information, time and location,
21 helped out.

22

 Similar in these playgrounds,
23 did the crime happen after the hours it
24 was closed? So in the case of Parkside,
25 when did that murder happen? Was this

1

2 one -- I was told from -- the streets are
3 talking -- that involved some type of
4 drug activity that happened. That's
5 different than the guy who jumps up on
6 the bleacher in the middle of the event
7 and starts popping off rounds. So to
8 know that for us is very important.

9 I was only able to get from you
10 guys 2011 crime stats at locations and
11 for my district only, and I've requested
12 as Public Safety Chair for every district
13 in the City of Philadelphia. In my area
14 alone, in the 19 rec centers, there were
15 322 in 2011 -- what is it called, Class I
16 felonies?

17 MR. RESNICK: Part I.

18 COUNCILMAN JONES: Part I
19 felonies in the 19 rec centers around,
20 four of them resulting in murder.

21 In the parks that are also
22 associated in my district, there were 610
23 Part I crimes, with 13 homicides.

24 So this is an important stat
25 for us so that we can govern and help to

1

2 steer activities that may help. If there
3 are more eyes, more people, maybe less of
4 those kind of after-hour things happen by
5 way of town watches. I'm giving
6 Overbrook Park two bicycles so that they
7 can ride the area around Rose Playground,
8 which our Commissioner helped clean up.
9 And it's a beautiful facility, but if we
10 don't have the information to know what
11 hours we're in danger, we're disarmed.

12 Finally, my question is, are
13 rec leaders in our various rec centers
14 informed based on Megan's Law about
15 sexual predators that may be released in
16 the area so that they can perk up, give a
17 heads-up and eyes on the situation
18 because a known offender has reentered
19 the community? Do we exchange that kind
20 of information with our rec leaders?

21 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BETHEL:
22 Councilman, I can't say that
23 specifically, but we can make that
24 happen. That's not a -- we can make that
25 happen. I mean, it's an open forum. We

1

2 deal with the Megan's Law on a regular
3 basis. I can't say we specifically have
4 a policy where we notify the rec director
5 that a Megan Law. But, again, that's
6 something that we will take a look at,
7 and I'll talk to Commissioner Slawson and
8 we'll make it happen.

9

COUNCILMAN JONES: We had
10 considered the Special Victims Unit for a
11 location in my district 500 feet from
12 McDevitt, I think it was, Playground.
13 That was a consideration, that how do we
14 know that the predator who is watching
15 the kid swing 500 feet away is there.
16 And that kind of information exchanged
17 both to the community is important but to
18 the rec leader, who has the
19 responsibility of safeguarding that
20 location. That kind of communication is
21 what we want to see. And the good thing
22 about us here is that what you tell us in
23 2009, you're going to get asked in 2012.
24 So this won't go away. As Councilman Oh
25 talked about, as our Chairwoman talked

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2 about, these pieces of information help
3 us consider your budget requests so we
4 know how to apply more resources to help
5 you do your job.

6

Thank you, Madam Chair.

7

COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Thank you.

8

Thank you so much.

9

10 And Councilman Oh has another
question.

11

12 COUNCILMAN OH: I'm sorry. I
don't.

13

14 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: No, you
don't. All right.

15

16 Well, we want to thank you for
17 being here this morning and for your
18 comments. Before you go, I do want to
19 just for the record state I want to give
20 a special thanks in his absence to
21 Commissioner Ramsey, who has been just a
22 fantastic commissioner, who has done an
23 outstanding job. Whenever we as members
24 of Council reach out to him, he
25 immediately reaches back, and even took
time last week to ride through my

1

2 district with me and talk about some hot
3 spots and issues that we were having.

4

5 And also I would be remiss if I
6 didn't acknowledge and thank the captains
7 in the 8th District that I work with,
8 Captain Dale in the 14th, Captain
9 McCloskey in the 35th and Captain Johnson
10 in the 39th. And so in their absence as
11 well, I just wanted to acknowledge what a
12 help they've been and how they are
13 always, always on the job and on top of
14 things in the district. And thank you so
15 much for being here today.

16

MR. RESNICK: Thank you.

17

COUNCILWOMAN BASS: And next
18 we're going to call up -- pretty much
19 everybody has said that they have to go
20 early. So we're going to take folks as
21 quickly as we can, and we ask that they
22 limit their comments and be as brief as
23 possible.

24

First we're going to ask
25 Ms. Deion Jordan -- or is it Mr. Deion
Jordan from the Philadelphia Youth

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2 Commission; also Mr. Darryl Coates,
3 Executive Director of the Philadelphia
4 Anti-Drug/Anti-Violence Network; and
5 Ms. Tracey Gordon from Concerned Citizens
6 of Southwest Philadelphia. Ms. Tracey
7 Gordon.

8

MS. GORDON: Here.

9

(Witnesses approached witness
10 table.)

11

COUNCILWOMAN BASS: And you're
12 Ms. Jordan?

13

MS. BURLEY: Jamira Burley from
14 the Philadelphia Youth Commission.

15

COUNCILWOMAN BASS: I'm sorry.
16 They said that Deion Jordan was going
17 to --

18

MS. BURLEY: He's going to
19 present.

20

COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Okay. I'm
21 sorry. So there's two together.

22

And is Darryl Coates here?
23 (No response.)

24

COUNCILWOMAN BASS: No?

25

MS. WHITE: I'm representing

1

2 him.

3

4 representing Mr. Coates?

5

MS. WHITE: Yes.

6

7 Ms. Tracey Gordon is here.

8

MR. GORDON: Yes.

9

10 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: And why
don't we have you begin your testimony.

11

12 For the young lady who is
13 representing Mr. Coates, we're going to
14 ask you to have a seat here in the front
and we'll take you in the next round.

15

Okay. If you want to begin.

16

MS. GORDON: Good morning --

17

18 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Good
morning.

19

20 MS. GORDON: -- Councilwoman,
Councilman Jones and Councilman Oh.
21 Thank you for having this important
22 meeting. Thank you for inviting me. I'd
23 first like to say that I think this is a
24 very, very, very important meeting. One,
25 because I am a mother of four kids that I

1

2 raised that frequented the recreation
3 centers. My daughter was a collegiate
4 athlete, and the first time she picked up
5 a ball was at the recreation centers.
6 And I was a single parent, and that's
7 where they went after school and that's
8 where they went to the after-school
9 programs, and I had to be -- I had to
10 feel comfortable that they were safe
11 there while I worked.

12 Also, my discipline or what I
13 studied for in college is risk management
14 and insurance. So I see a lot of things
15 differently than most people. I'm always
16 looking for ways to make things better.
17 And so this is not just to complain about
18 our recreation centers; this is just to
19 improve them.

20 And thank you for asking the
21 question about the predator question. I
22 mean, that's on my list. I'm very
23 concerned about why wouldn't staff be
24 alerted when predators move in and around
25 our communities, because that's the main

1

2 places they go. They become coaches.

3 They hang around recreation centers, you

4 know. So it seems to me that they will

5 have weekly or monthly alerts. They have

6 e-mail. They have computers, and centers

7 have computers. That's the Megan's Law,

8 so they can be aware of these people.

9 Hang the sign up maybe on the bulletin

10 board so people can be aware that these

11 predators live in their midst.

12 One of the things -- the way I

13 put my testimony is in question form.

14 And I'm sorry to hear about the young

15 lady that got raped at Myers. I frequent

16 Myers for meetings because it's in my

17 neighborhood, and I use the bathroom, and

18 I am scared as an adult. It is a scary

19 place. That situation in all recreation

20 centers should have already had safety

21 assessments, risk assessments long before

22 an injury occurred. It's to me common

23 sense, but, then again, I study risk

24 management and insurance.

25 So I wanted to know, are there

1

2 currently any safety training and
3 procedures being conducted annually with
4 staff and supervisors? And if so, do you
5 all have a copy of this manual? Because
6 they can come and say they do this stuff,
7 but if you don't have a copy of it, what
8 shows the proof? Can we get proof that
9 they have that?

10

 Is there a way during after
11 school and summer hours that police
12 officers can be assigned? That's what
13 the Councilman addressed.

14

 I wanted to ask about the
15 cameras, and I think that's good. But do
16 you have statistics on the amount of
17 crime happening around centers? And I
18 called for those stats for my testimony,
19 and they said they wouldn't give it to
20 you two, so I said take my name off the
21 list, because I know they're not going to
22 give it to Tracey Gordon. And these are
23 stats that I think the public should
24 know.

25

 For instance, I'll give you an

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2 example. A month ago there was a big
3 fight at a small recreation center,
4 McCreesh, between the Liberians and the
5 African Americans. It was a huge fight.
6 I learned about it a month later through
7 the grapevine, and when I called the
8 supervisor of the staff, I said, What's
9 going on here? Is my son safe?

10 He's getting ready to go in the
11 military October 1st, but those days are
12 long between guns and stuff. And he
13 hadn't even called the 12th District. I
14 called the 12th District, and then they
15 disseminated something. In other words,
16 why didn't the community know that there
17 was a fight between two different
18 cultures where we could have had a
19 meeting and we could have squashed it,
20 you know?

21 No one -- are the supervisors
22 in these recreation centers, are they
23 staffed? Are they trained to know how to
24 act upon this? And then how do the
25 community know that there was a situation

1

2 so they won't send they kids in the
3 middle of a turf war?

4

5 Lastly, I think -- have we ever
6 heard for the sign-in sheets around the
7 centers and was the community, besides
8 the newspapers in that area, informed
9 about the rape of the young girl in Myers
10 Recreation Center? As a parent -- a lot
11 of people don't read, but I think people
12 should have been probably notified about
13 that. I know a lot of times the police
14 won't give out statistics because they
15 don't want us to be so scared to death,
16 but I think as a parent, I should know
17 that, hey, an 11-year-old girl got raped.
Should I do something?

18

19 And, finally, do the Department
20 of Recreation have a staff, a risk
21 assessment director, that performs yearly
22 audits? Not just safeties. And I know
23 they don't, because if they did, then the
24 bleachers that's been at McCreesh at 67th
25 and Regent for the 19 years that I've
been there, the actual board is missing

1

2 and somebody could actually get impaled.
3 They've been sitting there.

4

5 So the risk management or the
6 safety director that they have just
7 testified that they have, do they really
8 have it? Because I see unsafe
9 situations, particularly in McCreesh, but
10 I see it all over some of these
11 recreation centers, which is a liability
12 to us, but, okay, that's money, but
13 that's still somebody's kid or some adult
14 getting hurt.

15

16 So I'd like to thank you for
17 it, but I'd like for you to follow up.
18 Like you said, you asked for something
19 from 2009. It's 2012 now. They have to
20 respect you as the Chair of the
21 Recreation Department, as the people
22 that's going to approve they budget. And
23 we want to know, are these supervisors
24 trained to be risk -- where they can see
25 risk and they can make sure that they got
trained to know, Hey, look in your
computer every day, every week, check for

1

2 these safety things, here's some
3 predators in the area.

4

5 We can get better. This is
6 2012. We can get better. They have
7 computers.

7

8 Thank you.

8

9 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Thank you.

9

10 Thank you for your testimony. I agree
11 with you, we can get better, and I think
12 that having this meeting here today is
13 definitely on that road.

13

14 But before we go into
15 questions, I do want to ask you to
16 proceed with your testimony.

16

17 MS. BURLEY: Good morning,
18 members of City Council. As mentioned,
19 my name is Jamira Burley and I'm the
20 Executive Director for the Philadelphia
21 Youth Commission.

21

22 Before I have the opportunity
23 to turn it over to one of our
24 commissioners to provide testimony here
25 today, I would like to first thank
26 members of City Council, government

1

2 officials, members of the Philadelphia
3 Police Department and Commissioner
4 Slawson for moving forward in such a
5 swift manner to make sure that incidents
6 like this does not occur in our
7 recreation or park areas in Philadelphia.

8

I would like to also mention
9 that one thing that has been highlighted
10 throughout the course of testimony today
11 is that we keep asking this question, how
12 did this happen in our community centers
13 and our recreation, and I think it's
14 important for us to also try to identify
15 why is this happening. As many of us
16 know, violence itself is a mental health
17 issue in many cases. So I think it's
18 really important for us to try to
19 identify why are young people committing
20 such crimes in our recreation
21 departments, but also how can we now
22 solve it and make sure these occurrences
23 don't happen again. Because we can only
24 put so much prevention in place. We can
25 only add so many cameras, so many police

1

2 officers until we start to really start
3 to get down to the nitty-gritty and ask
4 why are young people committing these
5 crimes against each other.

6

So with that being said, I
7 would like to actually turn the mic over
8 to one of our commissioners, Jordan, who
9 is actually appointed by Councilman
10 Goode, and he is going into his senior
11 year at Constitutional High School.

12

COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Very nice.
13 Well, thank you for being here.

14

MR. JORDAN: Thank you. Good
15 morning, members of City Council.

16

COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Good
17 morning.

18

MR. JORDAN: My name is Deion
19 Jordan. I'm here on behalf of the
20 Philadelphia Youth Commission.

21

The Philadelphia Youth
22 Commission began service in 2008 with the
23 purpose of representing Philadelphia's
24 youth in public hearings and providing
25 testimony that reflects the youth

1
2 perspective. We work with the City,
3 non-profits, community organizations, and
4 private entities to develop strategies to
5 improve the lives of Philadelphia's
6 youth. We hope that the testimony we
7 provide here today will shed light on the
8 thoughts and concerns of more than
9 300,000 young people we represent. I
10 would like to thank the distinguished
11 members of City Council for allowing me
12 to testify on behalf of the Philadelphia
13 Youth Commission.

14 I appear before you today to
15 present testimony on the issue of
16 violence at the City's parks and
17 recreational facilities. I would like to
18 direct everyone's attention to the recent
19 crimes that ensued at facilities over the
20 last few months. Those acts committed
21 were heinous, disgusting, and
22 unbelievable. They are things that no
23 parent or child should ever have to
24 encounter nor endure in life.

25 We must take action at once to

1
2 ensure that these events do not happen
3 again, which is why I think it's
4 important to look at best practices
5 around the country. In Minneapolis, the
6 recreational facilities have an
7 unconventional security system where the
8 identification cards of every person
9 entering the facility are checked. Many
10 may deem it to be a hassle and cumbersome
11 to implement, but with that being said, I
12 believe that this is something that works
13 and should be adopted in Philadelphia.
14 Furthermore, if video surveillance
15 systems were installed in almost all of
16 the recreational facilities in
17 Philadelphia, I believe that would
18 significantly impact the number of crimes
19 committed and also deter youth from
20 committing such acts.

21 It is said that a child's
22 safety should never depend on cost. I
23 wholeheartedly believe this despite the
24 fact that I don't have children. I
25 believe safety is a major necessity and

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is in dire need of an update.

 If we want to see the crime rate descend, we must put our best foot forward and work cohesively and intelligently on creating and implementing innovative security measures to protect everybody who takes advantage of public recreational facilities, especially our youth. The Philadelphia Youth Commission looks to be a resource in the development of such security measures for recreational centers. I spoke with a gentleman in my community last week who identified himself as a youth advocate. We engaged in brief discourse surfacing on the topic of him working at the rec -- working in a recreation center and how he had encountered children who, and I quote, "exhibited cantankerous and belligerent behaviors and had no regard for anyone but themselves." I told the gentleman that this is a problem that has to be and can be fixed with the assistance of this

1

2 great city and other entities.

3

4 I don't blame the children or
5 the parents for this incident at Myers
6 Recreation Center, because staff were
7 present when the crime took place. I was
8 informed that youth articulated lewd and
9 vulgar language in the presence of staff
10 with no repercussion as well.

11

12 With that being said, I believe
13 that employees should go through a
14 training process that is primarily
15 focused on non-violent communication,
16 restorative practices, and youth
17 advocacy. It is going to take a
18 passion -- it is going to take the
19 passion and doggedness from all of us to
20 effectively work through this problem.
21 The Youth Commission would love to work
22 with all entities in attendance to
23 eradicate the onuses in the City and
24 reform recreational security measures.
25 It can and will be done.

26

27 Thank you.

28

29 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Thank you.

1

2 Thank you for your testimony.

3

4 And we're going to open it up

5

Councilman Jones.

6

7 COUNCILMAN JONES: We, at the

8

beginning of the hearing, talked about

9

creative partnerships. We won't arrest

10

our way out of this, as you cited.

11

There's a bigger pervasive problem of

12

violence in our communities. And we

13

won't budget our way out of it, because

14

we have shrinking resources.

15

Do you have suggestions on how

16

we can engage the community, engage

17

non-profits, maybe engage citizens and

18

block captains to be more a part of

19

recreation facilities so that more eyes

20

can be on situations?

21

We've had situations in parts

22

of our district where we couldn't open

23

centers because there weren't adults to

24

guard the bathrooms, because obviously as

25

you mentioned, Ms. Gordon, they are risk

assessments. The bathroom is where bad

1

2 things can happen if there aren't
3 monitors there.

4 So how do we make peanut butter
5 meet jelly and create a resource called
6 great?

7 MS. GORDON: I think the staff
8 need to be -- we should hire staff that
9 are trained to be communicators, are
10 trained to be creative as far as learning
11 how to organize. I think that when we
12 hire staff, they should have those
13 experience factors that can make -- you
14 know, be better communicators.

15 For instance, we haven't had a
16 PSA meeting in our area for months, only
17 because they don't have good
18 communicators. They're not disseminating
19 the information as well. You have to get
20 out of there and get volunteers. There's
21 plenty of volunteers, but if that
22 director of that particular facility is
23 not as enthusiastic or engaged as the
24 community is, you'll go -- some centers
25 are like the best centers. Look at who

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2 the director of the center is.

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COUNCILMAN JONES: Well, maybe we can get someone from the Rec Department to speak to your question, which is how are the staff trained, and in addition, by way of creative coalitions, how many of them have active advisory councils. I think those are two good questions that maybe we can get a response to, Madam Chair.

COUNCILWOMAN BASS: I think we can.

Do we have someone available to provide that information today?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SLAWSON: We do.

COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Great. So as soon as we complete this panel, we'll go back into those questions.

MS. GORDON: The advisory councils are only as good as the director of that facility. And I have experience at McCreesh. We have attempted to have an advisory council and it has been

1

2 sabotaged by the director. And then I go
3 into other areas, and advisory councils
4 is like the best in the world.

5

6 So if the staff isn't made to
7 comply with a manual that they're given
8 and they're not getting the particular
9 trainings and how to organize, how to do
10 a flyer, how to meet -- maybe I give them
11 consideration. Maybe they don't know,
12 but why not? We need staff that are
13 trained and qualified.

13

14 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Why don't
15 we at this point ask Sue Slawson to come
16 forward, if you're available to discuss
17 that. Would you be the person that
18 would?

18

19 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SLAWSON:
20 And Leo.

20

21 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: And Leo as
22 well, Leo Dignam.

22

23 Because I agree with you, Ms.
24 Gordon. If we don't have information
25 disseminated into the community, it's
more than just being uninformed; it's a

1

2 real problem, and it can be dangerous.

3 And so the communication on both ends of
4 the spectrum, the communication between
5 the advisory council and the rec leader,
6 needs to be excellent. So we need to see
7 how that --

8

MS. GORDON: And it has to be
9 uniform. It's not fair that the big
10 centers have the best than the little
11 centers. All the staff, directors, they
12 have to be trained in a uniform manner
13 and follow the training manual and do
14 their job.

15

COUNCILWOMAN BASS: There has
16 to be uniformity.

17

(Witnesses approached witness
18 table.)

19

COUNCILWOMAN BASS:

20 Commissioner, would you like to...

21

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SLAWSON:

22 Yes. If I could address just
23 communication with the incident that
24 happened at Francis Myers first, I'd like
25 to do that.

1
2 I have a letter here that we
3 sent out to the community after that
4 incident, and I also contacted the
5 Department of Behavioral Health and I set
6 up for them to go out to deal with any
7 potential emotional or mental or whatever
8 that may be going on in that community.
9 Because people don't come forth and say
10 that something is bothering them as a
11 result of the alleged rape there, I made
12 sure that we sent staff out there from
13 the Behavioral Health Department to
14 address that issue, as well as Deputy
15 Mayor Michael DiBerardinis. We sent this
16 letter out to the community. So my
17 apologies if it wasn't circulated to
18 everyone at the facility, but we did
19 reach out.

20 As far as training with our
21 staff, we have, over the past three
22 years, intentionally beefed up our
23 training. And I will agree with Tracey
24 that our facilities are only as good as
25 the staff that we place in our

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2 facilities. That's with any type of job
3 that you have. And so it's our job, it's
4 our responsibility to ensure that we are
5 providing the necessary training for our
6 staff, and we've been doing that. And if
7 Leo would -- if you could talk about some
8 of the training that we've providing our
9 staff.

10 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DIGNAM: We
11 have ongoing training with all of our
12 supervisors. And, again, we have
13 recreation centers as well as
14 playgrounds, and depending on the size of
15 the facility and the number of programs,
16 there are differing staffing situations.
17 But all the facilities that are actively
18 managed and have active programs do have
19 a supervisor. So the supervisor must go
20 through yearly trainings where we take on
21 such topics as safety, programming,
22 working with the Police Department,
23 advisory council trainings. We have over
24 100 advisory councils. And, again,
25 advisory councils are volunteer

1

2 organizations, and they're only as good
3 as the volunteers that we get in these
4 facilities.

5

6 So if Ms. Gordon has any issues
7 with the rec leader -- I know at the site
8 that she mentioned, McCreesh Playground,
9 has a very large and active after-school
10 program. We have over 40 kids. It is a
11 neighborhood of a lot of Liberians that
12 have moved into the community, and they
13 take advantage of soccer programs that we
14 do at the facility, as well as the
15 after-school programs. I was not aware
16 of a turf war that was going on at that
17 location that she mentioned, but I will
18 certainly look into that and contact the
19 district manager.

20 We also have district managers
21 who visit each one of our facilities
22 every week. The rec leaders are trained
23 to do a safety assessment. We are not
24 trained risk managers per se, but we do
25 have documentation that we go out on a
regular basis to make sure there are no

1

2 dangerous situations. And we will look
3 into that bench that you talked about,
4 the bleachers with the broken bench.

5

COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Okay.

6

7

8

9

10

Thank you. And there's two different
things here. There's safety and then
there's security, which are two different
things, and we want to look at both of
them and consider it.

11

12

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14

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18

I think that that answers our
questions for now, and I think that this
is an ongoing process, and in the future,
we'll be working together to try to make
sure we can remedy some of these
situations, particularly around
communication and interaction with the
community.

19

And I'm sorry, Councilman.

20

21

22

23

24

25

COUNCILMAN JONES: Just a brief
point. If you could -- and I understand
budget will dictate a lot of this. So
I'm real clear about it. But one of the
things that we can do is gain better
insight from your managers at the

1

2 facilities that says, you know, recently
3 the camera went down, the fence went out,
4 that's a risk assessment, and gain a
5 sense of vulnerability, if you would, at
6 a site. That allows District
7 Councilpeople to put their money where
8 their mouth is to help out with the rec
9 center. That's number one.

10 And number two, a survey of an
11 assessment of some of the advisory
12 councils to be able to say, Well -- and
13 things happen. In 2009, Mrs. Johnson
14 didn't have a job and she was very active
15 at the rec. Then she got employed and
16 things fell off.

17 So we have to have a constant
18 monitoring, maybe yearly evaluation of
19 the health and wellbeing of an advisory
20 council so as to have that partnership
21 with the community.

22 I do know that in some cases --
23 and it's just human nature -- that
24 advisory councils tend to be sometimes,
25 on occasion, in conflict with rec

1
2 leaders. We had one situation which our
3 Commissioner dealt with candidly where
4 the advisory council felt that they
5 should have an after hours event that
6 included libations. And that is clearly
7 prohibited, and we dealt with it in a
8 tasteful fashion, but that kind of
9 constant sharing of information and
10 evaluation of our recreation advisory
11 councils I think is essential to the
12 health and wellbeing of the entire
13 center. So whether or not the staff are
14 getting along, at least we can get a
15 better sense of the viability, the
16 health, the wellbeing, the security risk
17 of particular centers. You can't be
18 everywhere. You can't do it all. We
19 need to engage one another to take some
20 responsibility for that.

21 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SLAWSON:

22 And if I can, with that being said, if
23 there are instances where you are hearing
24 that there may be some conflict with our
25 staff, volunteers, advisory councils or

1

2 just community, sometimes things don't
3 get to our office, and if someone could
4 drop us a note by way of communicating
5 the information that you have, we'd love
6 to be notified about those instances so
7 we can deal with them as quickly as
8 possible so they don't swell and grow and
9 mushroom and we have bigger issues than
10 we really have to have.

11 And I'm not sure if you were in
12 here, Councilman Jones, when we talked
13 about the survey, the assessment of the
14 facilities that we are doing to ensure --
15 and we also do annual assessments of our
16 facilities. As a matter of fact, it's
17 around end of August, September, our
18 leaders will go through the facilities
19 and identify different capital projects
20 and things that our maintenance staff can
21 do to ensure the safety of the facility,
22 whether it's a broken bench or something
23 outside or a fence that has holes. So we
24 do that on an annual basis.

25 COUNCILMAN JONES: I'm aware.

1
2 You and Commissioner DiBerardinis are
3 skillful at negotiating those kinds of
4 improvements, and we appreciate you doing
5 that and prioritizing them for public
6 safety, so when there's a camera out or
7 there's a fence that needs to be
8 replaced, we get that. I guess kind of
9 what we're trying to do by way of
10 solutions is figure out all of the
11 possible resources that we can bring to
12 bear. And if there are facilities
13 that -- I have facilities in my district
14 in certain parts that you can't get
15 another ball team on a field. You cannot
16 get another activity at the center. And
17 in fact, I love it when the conflict is
18 that I want my dance troop in on this
19 time versus your karate troop. That
20 shows health and interest in a center.
21 But, then again, there are other places
22 where you don't have that activity, and
23 sometimes elected officials and community
24 leaders need to get together and create
25 that activity so that it can serve as a

1
2 public safety environment that we can
3 have more people involved at a particular
4 location. So assessing where we have
5 high volume versus where we have low
6 volume and less interest, maybe we can
7 balance that out with all of our
8 involvement.

9 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Very good.
10 Councilwoman.

11 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Yes.
12 I wanted to mention, because I understood
13 there were some reference to Africans and
14 Caribbeans in that area. And this
15 weekend -- I have flyers and programs
16 that I'll certainly make available -- we
17 have our annual program. Echoes of
18 Africa is 15 years old, and we have
19 programs here on Friday night, the 17th,
20 6:00 to 8:00 in the Mayor's Reception
21 Room and Conversation Hall where we have
22 an African meal prepared by Kilimanjaro.
23 That's an African caterer. And then on
24 Saturday from 9:00 to 12:00, we're at the
25 Zoo, and we honor -- in fact, on Friday

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2 night, we always honor ambassadors, prime
3 ministers and such. And on Saturday,
4 there's more of a family affair and we
5 honor people from our city who work to
6 try to make life better in various areas
7 for many people. I mean, it could be
8 like people dealing with cancer, HIV/AIDS
9 here. So we'll be honoring about a dozen
10 people who work with the African and
11 Caribbean community and our community at
12 large.

13 And I said those things to
14 say -- and also our commission, Liberia,
15 was mentioned. Our chairman just came
16 back from Liberia where he spent ten
17 days. And we represent 38 African and
18 Caribbean communities, and the Mayor's
19 Commission on African and Caribbean
20 Immigrant Affairs has adopted Tilden
21 after an African kid was severely beaten.

22 So as many problems as we have,
23 there's hope, because there are people
24 who care and who realize that after all,
25 we are one community. And for all the

1

2 problems that they have had in Southwest,
3 we're trying to work with them, and we
4 work. So we do have this resource. All
5 we need is a room, Mr. President. We
6 need our own room.

7

8 But certainly we are -- so
9 we're there. So there is hope even on
10 that end. So I'll make sure that you
11 have brochures and invitations so you
12 know, and anyone else who realize that we
13 are the premier -- one of the premier in
14 the country. We're the premier
15 organization dealing with African,
16 Caribbeans in the region.

16

17 So we're there. And we sponsor
18 a lot of affairs at Myers between Myers
19 and Kingessing, and we work with them,
20 and Recreation always works with us. And
21 during the summer, many of the -- like
22 the 50-year independence celebration was
23 just celebrated last week by Volfi Javita
24 (ph) and the Liberian community.

24

25

25 So there are many activities
going on, but the City does have an

1

2 agenda for this community, and we'll make
3 sure that we share it so that everybody
4 is aware that this population is not just
5 ignored and nothing happening to improve
6 the quality of life for the students and
7 for those who have businesses and those
8 who want to expand businesses and start
9 businesses.

10 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SLAWSON:

11 Thank you.

12 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
13 you, Madam Chair.

14 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Thank you
15 for sharing that information. I think
16 it's valuable, and everyone can gain
17 something from it.

18 If there's no more questions,
19 thank you so much for returning. Don't
20 go far.

21 And next up, we're going to
22 have the representative from the
23 Philadelphia Anti-Drug/Anti-Violence
24 Network, along with Ms. Candy Owens from
25 the Dan Rumph Foundation and Ms. Kathryn

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2 Ott-Lovell. Is she still here -- come
3 forward -- from the Fairmount Park
4 Conservancy.

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COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Madam
Chair, may I say that National Night
Out -- I see Anthony Murphy here -- plays
a role in all of this, because crime and
violence spills over everywhere, in our
parks, on our streets, and certainly when
we celebrate National Night Out, I wish
the press would cover some of the great
things we do and not all of the negative
things we do, because we have so many
organized blocks. Thank you, Mr. Murphy.
So many people who come out and sponsor
block parties like we do on Melville, and
it's just so important that people who
are not in the City see all the good
things we do as well as complain about
the bad.

22

23

24

25

COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Yes.

COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
you.

COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Thank you.

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2

(Witnesses approached witness

3

table.)

4

COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Okay. And

5

why don't we begin our testimony with --

6

can you state your name for the record,

7

representing the Anti-Violence/Anti-Drug.

8

MS. WHITE: Yes. Good morning,

9

Madam Chair and Council. My name is

10

Delta White and I am the COO of the

11

Philadelphia Anti-Drug/Anti-Violence

12

Network, P.A.A.N.

13

COUNCILWOMAN BASS: You want to

14

begin your testimony?

15

MS. WHITE: Yes. First, let me

16

say that Darryl Coates could not be here

17

today because he is on an extended leave.

18

My being here this morning, I'm happy to

19

be here and wanted to just start by

20

saying that, as mentioned by Mr. Resnick

21

this morning, P.A.A.N. is one of the

22

community partners with the Youth

23

Violence Reduction Partnership

24

initiative, and as such, our role is to

25

work with the most at-risk youth in the

1

2 communities that we serve and in those
3 specific police districts. And as part
4 of that work, not only do we work with
5 those youth partners, their families,
6 their siblings, and individuals in their
7 communities, one of our focuses really is
8 on enhancing and expanding relationships
9 with the recs and community centers.

10 We have small programs at
11 several of the recs and community centers
12 with these young people, which provide
13 them life skills, educational
14 improvements, opportunities to prepare
15 for certain GED tests and other job
16 placement tests.

17 Part of that work is
18 establishing these relationships with the
19 rec centers in a different way, that we
20 just don't stop by, but we try to
21 actively engage not only our young people
22 but the young people in the rec center as
23 well that are interested in
24 participating.

25 More recently, we've worked to

1
2 identify fathers in those rec centers or
3 around those rec centers that they might
4 participate and as well as have their
5 children there with them. We're
6 currently working on an initiative which
7 actually increases the engagement in our
8 communities with our young people in a
9 way that we've provided many of them with
10 a small part-time work experience over
11 the last couple of summers. We want to
12 move that from summer year round. Not
13 just the work piece, but engaging them in
14 the stakeholder groups and meeting with
15 their Councilpeople, meeting with other
16 people in the community so that they
17 become a little bit more actively
18 engaged.

19 We feel that by becoming more
20 active participants as opposed to just
21 coming to a program will enable us to
22 have a greater impact with our rec
23 departments and community centers.

24 Thank you.

25 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Thank you.

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Thank you for your testimony.

And if we could have Ms. Owens.

MS. OWENS: Good morning. My name is Viola Owens. I'm one of the founders of the Daniel Eric Rumph Foundation. I'm also Daniel Eric Rumph's mother.

We started our foundation in 2006. August of 2006 we started having basketball tournaments up at the Mallery Recreation Center where we had 2 to 300 people come to view the basketball tournament per night. We recently had a basketball tournament last week and we had it at Arcadia and the Daniel Eric Rumph Recreation Center where we had 1,500 to 2,000 people viewing. We also had a community cookout on Saturday, which we fed close to a thousand people. During the course of the day, we had a police officer on site up until 3:30 in the afternoon. We always talk to our police district, our 14th District police station when we have these affairs so

1

2 that we can have police on site and
3 coming around during the time of our
4 tournament.

5

6 We've been having this
7 tournament for seven years. We never had
8 a problem. We never had any type of
9 confrontations, argument or anything
10 during this time.

11

12 We also have Christmas parties,
13 Easter parties, Halloween parties for the
14 kids at the recreation center. We kind
15 of partner with the recreation center.
16 We help them -- we do donations to them
17 to help them renovate the center, to
18 bring the center up to code, to get
19 things that they need. We ask the
20 community to help as far as with the
21 security. We always get volunteer cops
22 that come forward to help us when we have
23 our affairs, that they volunteer during
24 the hours, usually in the evening. It
25 could last up until 10 o'clock in the
 evening. So we do get volunteers from
 the police force that come and stay

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2 around until our closing to make sure
3 that everything is okay.

4

COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Okay. And
5 it's a very successful tournament. Like
6 I said, I've been there many, many times,
7 and it just goes to show that Recreation
8 and our City does work. It works well.
9 We need to involve all of our community
10 partners. And so I just wanted to add
11 that as well.

12

Ms. Ott-Lovell.

13

MS. OTT-LOVELL: Good morning.
14 The Fairmount Park Conservancy is a
15 non-profit organization that exists to
16 champion Fairmount Park and Philadelphia
17 Parks and Recreation. In close
18 partnership with Philadelphia Parks and
19 Recreation, we've been working
20 intensively for the past three years in
21 Hunting Park, an 87-acre park located in
22 the heart of North Philadelphia. We've
23 seen great success in Hunting Park.
24 We've raised over \$4 million for capital
25 and programmatic improvements in the

1

2 park, including improvements critical to
3 public safety such as redesigning the
4 lighting throughout the park, removing
5 dead and dying trees to improve sight
6 lines into the park, building a community
7 garden on a former site where prostitutes
8 frequented. We've started a farmers'
9 market that happens every week April
10 through November, and we built two new
11 playgrounds there.

12 But I believe the number one
13 thing that has created most of our
14 success, if not all of our success in
15 Hunting Park, has been our work in
16 building and supporting an extraordinary
17 community group there, Hunting Park
18 United, which is now over 160 members
19 strong. Very soon, in partnership with
20 Hunting Park United and Philadelphia
21 Parks and Recreation, we'll be convening
22 a public safety advisory committee
23 comprised of Hunting Park United members,
24 local residents, representatives from the
25 25th Police District, park rangers,

1

2 recreation center staff and others.

3

4 Now that some of the illicit
5 activity has decreased in the park,
6 specifically in the drug trade and
7 prostitution, the local residents are
8 speaking out about quality of life
9 issues, such as drinking, loud music,
10 illegal vending. Now that the park is
11 coming back to life and being reclaimed
12 by this community, people seem resolved
13 not to let it return to its former state.

14 We know that quality of life
15 issues often lead to more serious
16 problems around violence and crime. What
17 our experience of Hunting Park has taught
18 us is that the community must be
19 vigilant. They must be partners and
20 leaders in the reclamation of their parks
21 and recreation centers as public spaces
22 meant for healthy, safe, active, and
23 passive recreation.

24 Unfortunately, the Fairmount
25 Park Conservancy can't work at this scale
in every park. Likewise, the

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2

Philadelphia Parks and Recreation

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Department is not equipped with the

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critical resources and funding they need

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to achieve the goals we are talking about

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today. We must recognize the correlation

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between the lack of funding allocated to

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Philadelphia Parks and Recreation and the

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safety in our parks. This is made very

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obvious by the wonderful campaign run by

11

the Philadelphia Parks Alliance led by

12

Lauren Bornfriend, their Executive

13

Director, just a few months ago where we

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really tried collectively as park

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partners to increase funding to parks and

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recreation.

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Increased safety will not come

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for free, and I believe we must find ways

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to provide the necessary funding to Parks

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and Recreation Department to help us

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support the level of utility and safety

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that the citizens of our city and our

23

neighborhoods so deserve.

24

Thank you.

25

COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Thank you.

1

2 Kathryn, can you talk -- we spoke briefly
3 when you first walked in about the
4 formation of a park watch group that
5 you're forming. Can you talk a little
6 bit about that?

7

MS. OTT LOVELL: Sure. What we
8 like to do at Hunting Park -- we have
9 this incredible community group, as I
10 mentioned. It's about 160 members. They
11 meet the second Saturday of every month
12 at the recreation center, and they really
13 become an umbrella organization for other
14 organizations in the community that
15 surround the park. It's a massive park
16 that connects five different
17 neighborhoods, and this issue around
18 safety keeps coming up.

19

The park, we have seen a
20 decrease in crime in the park, but we
21 really, as I said, need to remain
22 vigilant. And so we had a group of
23 Hunting Park United members that came to
24 us and said -- they're already patrolling
25 the park on their own in orange vests and

1

2 on bicycles and we really want to make
3 sure their efforts are coordinated with
4 local police as well as with recreation
5 center staff. So we're starting this
6 advisory committee and hopefully going to
7 form a community park watch. That is
8 coordinated as sort of a town watch and
9 that really is able to be vigilant, not
10 take crime into their own hands by any
11 means, but really be sort of a phone call
12 away from local law enforcement to help
13 really address issues as they happen in
14 the park so people feel safe there.

15 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Thank you
16 very much. You know, it's very
17 intriguing, the idea of the community
18 park watch and having folks patrol as we
19 patrol your immediate neighborhood, but
20 also begin to think about how do we
21 patrol our parks and recreation centers
22 and how does that lessen some of the
23 pressure from the Police Department, who
24 can't be everywhere and can't do
25 everything at the same time. So thank

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2 you.

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MS. OTT-LOVELL: If I may add one more thing. I think that a town watch like this cannot just be -- they don't just need to be around public safety. They can also be ambassadors for the park and they can be ambassadors for the programs and wonderful things and events that happen in the park if they're educated about the services that are available. For instance, at Hunting Park that has so many different programs for young people, one of the largest pools in the City, not only stop that activity in the park but promote the real things, the great things that should happen in the park. They should be ambassadors as much as they should be watchers.

20

COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Very good.

21

Any questions?

22

23

24

25

COUNCILMAN JONES: Just a comment that parks like that one and Carroll Park and Malcolm X Park are oasis in neighborhoods, and one of the things

1

2 that we did our night out, we went to
3 various sites, and the one thing that I
4 always look forward to -- and Carroll
5 Park was the night out that they did.
6 And I don't know what happened this year,
7 but I'm going to make sure that I sit
8 down with the Council and make sure that
9 it happens every year going forward,
10 because what it did was re-invite people
11 to the park and say -- and we kind of
12 claimed it. It's almost like territorial
13 real estate that every so often, every 21
14 years, you have to rope it off and say,
15 Just let you know, we run this park. And
16 if not, it's left to elements that claim
17 it.

18 And so it's important from time
19 to time to have town watch to make sure
20 that people understand it's not okay for
21 you to do certain things here and that we
22 have a higher expectation for our
23 recreation facilities and parks.

24 So what you're doing by way of
25 town watch is essential to its operation,

1

2 because we're not going to have a beat
3 cop in every park, but we can have eyes
4 and ears that can connect to a whole host
5 of -- and I don't want anybody tackling
6 anybody. The people out in Carroll Park
7 are a little aggressive. They tend to
8 tackle people, but all I need you to do
9 is call the appropriate people to get
10 them there and take care of that.

11 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: No
12 tackling. Okay.

13 Councilwoman Blackwell.

14 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
15 you.

16 I always hear you talking about
17 my district. I was surprised when you
18 said Hunting Park, but it's okay. But we
19 thank you and thank you all. And let me
20 also mention Carol Rice back there. When
21 we say "recreation," she and I go way
22 back during the Lucien Blackwell days,
23 way back. So we are glad that she's
24 always part of the solution to help our
25 park system and the citizens of our city.

1

2

Thank you.

3

MS. OTT-LOVELL: Thank you.

4

COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Thank you.

5

Councilman Oh.

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COUNCILMAN OH: I wanted to

7

also thank you for all your good work and

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how well you've approached it. I did

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want to say, because I think it gets

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lost, that we do appreciate very much the

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parks as well as the recreation centers,

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and even more so these days where so many

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people don't have a place to relieve the

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stress they have in their life that has

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manifested itself in short tempers,

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problems within their families that

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results in violence. We do understand

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those things.

19

The issue that we're faced with

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from a kind of a broader point of view is

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diminishing resources. And we would love

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to put more money into the parks, but as

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you've been reading, there's an issue of

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somewhere of between \$75 to maybe \$200

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million in additional needs that the City

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2 may be obligated to. We're looking at
3 the School District once again. In other
4 words, it's a very heavy, heavy burden
5 upon the citizens of Philadelphia. So
6 we're really challenged with how do we
7 get more money from places that can give
8 it to us and place it into improving
9 parks and recreation and the quality of
10 life in neighborhoods. One of the things
11 that I really do think is that
12 suggestions and opportunities and
13 techniques to lower costs and to get
14 resources into these sites.

15 I do think personally, and I'm
16 just curious about your thoughts on it,
17 is some of the parks that you mentioned,
18 what they have is they have consistent
19 use. They are used consistently, and the
20 more people that use it, the safer and
21 the better and the more well-maintained
22 it is and the more there's interest. And
23 I'm aware of many parks which are
24 designed and have been used in ways that
25 are not consistent. For example, every

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2 third or fourth month a big picnic comes
3 in there. There's a lot of trash.
4 There's a lot of problems. And other
5 than that, they're not used. And I don't
6 know that the cost would be any greater
7 to kind of redesign the use, especially
8 around seniors and grandmothers, who are
9 the parents, acting as the parents. More
10 consistent use that way.

11 So I would love your ideas or
12 discussion at some point in time, if not
13 today.

14 And I would also say, finally,
15 that I do find challenging the fact that
16 it is difficult for me as a Councilman to
17 go to private sources as I have done up
18 till now to raise money for these type of
19 projects. As an at-large Councilperson,
20 I don't get an allocation for my district
21 because there are District Councilpeople
22 very much involved and more aware than I
23 am about the particulars of their
24 district, and they were elected by the
25 people in the community who distribute

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2 the dollars. So anything that I want to
3 do, I'm going to have to raise the money.
4 And we have a fund here in Philadelphia,
5 the fund for Philadelphia Incorporated,
6 501(c)(3), and it was my understanding
7 that I, as a Councilman, can open an
8 account, raise all the money that I need
9 to pay for things like this, but I've
10 been told that that's not the case and,
11 therefore, I have to look for alternative
12 means of funding some of the programs and
13 projects that I would like to add to in
14 any one of the District Councilpersons'
15 districts when it comes to those type of
16 things, parks, recreations.

17 So I'm very much interested in
18 any ideas from anybody about where we can
19 go and how we can get more private or
20 corporate dollars in light of the
21 challenges that we're facing in the
22 coming year.

23 Thank you very much. And any
24 ideas, suggestions, please feel free to
25 let me know.

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MS. OTT-LOVELL: Yeah. If I can respond. At the Conservancy, that's really why we were founded, to raise private dollars, dollars in the private sector and bring them into the public sector. And that's much of what we do today. So we've certainly figured out how to leverage critical resources from the private sector and bring them into the parks and recreation. I think more of it can be done. I think what's happening at Hunting Park and how that's a replicable model is that is a critical mass of partners coming together for a park. We're not there alone. We're there every day with Parks and Recreation and with other groups who are working hand in hand to lift that park up and with the community and other social service agencies in that neighborhood. McPherson Square that folks already talked about today is another great example of something that's at the very beginning of reclamation and rebirth,

1

2 but, again, a critical mass of partners
3 coming in from so many different areas.
4 I think the public/private partnerships
5 need to be built really to bring people
6 into these parks and have them see them
7 as their own.

8

9 We all know that there is
10 shrinking dollars from the public sector.
11 There's also shrinking dollars from the
12 private sector and more competition for
13 those dollars.

14

15 So anything that we can do to
16 enhance those public/private partnerships
17 and bring people together and
18 collaborate, I think that will really
19 create success. And we're happy to route
20 your funds through us, Councilman. If
21 you'd like to raise money for the
22 Conservancy, we'll gladly take it and
23 distribute it.

24

25 COUNCILMAN OH: Well, thanks
26 for your invitation. I will take you up
27 on that.

28

29 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: So we can

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2 also get some funds out too.

3

4 Okay. Thank you so much,
5 ladies, for your testimony today.

6

7 And next we're going to have
8 Nancy Goldenberg, Chair of the Parks and
9 Recreation Commission; Mr. Anthony Murphy
10 from Town Watch. And also, is Jeff
11 Hackett here from Sturgis?

12

(No response.)

13

14 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: No Jeff
15 Hackett, okay. Sylvia Simms, Parent
16 Power.

17

18 (Witnesses approached witness
19 table.)

20

21 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Good
22 morning.

23

24 MS. GOLDENBERG: Good morning.
25 Good morning, Chairwoman Bass, members of
the Committee. My name is Nancy
Goldenberg and I have the honor to serve
as the Chair of the City's Commission on
Parks and Recreation. I'd like to thank
my colleagues from the Commission who are
joining me today, Carol Rice and Barbara

1

2 Capozzi, and thank Commissioner
3 DiBerardinis and his staff, Police
4 Commissioner and his staff, who I know
5 work very hard and tirelessly to keep the
6 citizens of our city safe in our parks
7 and in our recreation centers and
8 throughout the City.

9 I'm here today on behalf of the
10 Commission to testify on a topic that has
11 been our focus for the past year - safety
12 in our parks and in our recreation
13 centers.

14 In partnership with the
15 Department of Parks and Recreation, for
16 the last year we have been holding our
17 bimonthly Commission meetings at
18 recreation centers throughout the City.
19 We've met across the City from Simons
20 Recreation Center in the Northwest,
21 Christy in the Southwest, Hunting Park,
22 Cobbs Creek, Lauretha Vaird Recreation
23 Center. Our goal has been to listen to
24 citizens tell their concerns about safety
25 in their centers and parks, and they

1

2 have -- there have been some distinct
3 trends.

4

5 One, a need for exterior
6 lighting, whether around recreation
7 centers or on trails and increased video
8 surveillance, which we heard about
9 earlier; a desire for improved signage;
10 improved enforcement of illegal dirt
11 bikes and ATVs; as well as stepped-up
12 enforcement of short dumping, illegal
13 vendors, loud music, illegal alcohol
14 consumption, drug transactions, and
15 graffiti.

15

16 We also heard about deferred
17 maintenance that has led to unsafe
18 conditions, things like benches that need
19 replacement, leaking pipes, and clogged
20 drains that cause sidewalks to crack and
21 buckle, and overgrown trees in desperate
22 need of pruning to improve lines of
23 sight.

23

24 Whether quality of life crimes
25 or crimes of opportunity, whether crimes
26 against people or against property, the

1

2 results of these activities and actions
3 of neglect are devastating to the quality
4 of life of our neighborhoods and
5 degrading to thousands of acres of
6 parkland.

7

8 In addition to listening to our
9 citizens, the Commission has been doing
10 research of its own on best practices in
11 other cities across the country. We've
12 interviewed park and recreation
13 professionals in New York City, Los
14 Angeles, St. Louis, Baltimore, Atlanta,
Pittsburgh, and Chicago.

15

16 We've learned -- what we've
17 learned is that a uniformed presence in
18 parks and at recreation centers is
19 critical. Most cities use a combination
20 of police officers and park enforcement
21 patrols to curb crime. The enforcement
22 patrols range from off-duty police or
23 other retired public safety personnel to
24 rangers and volunteers on foot, on
25 horseback, on bicycles, and in
park-branded cars. One city is

1

2 experimenting with swipe cards for the
3 kids using their recreation centers in
4 combination with video surveillance, and
5 other cities are actually placing police
6 substations in recreation centers to
7 underscore the importance of a uniformed
8 police presence.

9

 This October, as you heard
10 earlier, the Commission, in partnership
11 with the Department of Parks and
12 Recreation, is planning to host a one and
13 a half day forum on safety in our parks
14 and at our recreation centers. The
15 working title of this event is
16 "Delivering Safe Parks and Recreation
17 Centers: Best Practices and Next Steps."
18 The purpose of this one and a half day
19 event is to convene those involved and
20 begin a dialogue. We want to learn best
21 practices from each other and begin to
22 develop a common course of action. We're
23 planning to bring some of the
24 professionals we interviewed by phone to
25 Philadelphia to meet with public

1
2 officials, sump as yourselves, staff and
3 citizens. The hopeful outcome will be a
4 more informed group of Philadelphians
5 with clear recommendations on how best to
6 tackle these safety and quality of life
7 issues. We hope you will be able to
8 participate. As we solidify our agenda,
9 we'll most certainly keep you informed.

10 Cities across the country have
11 experienced the same challenges we now
12 face in our parks and at our recreation
13 centers. Many have adeptly managed to
14 control crime activities through a
15 variety of means - vigilant enforcement,
16 deployment of staff, employment of new
17 technologies, partnerships with
18 private-sector partners, and increased
19 volunteerism, just to name a few. They
20 have seen crimes drop significantly and
21 have witnessed a return of users happily
22 playing and enjoying themselves. Of
23 course, I'm not so naive to suggest this
24 turnaround can happen without additional
25 resources. It can't, and City Council

1

2 and the Administration will need to
3 commit consistently to provide funds to
4 make necessary changes come about.
5 Equally important, we collectively need
6 to keep this issue on the front burner
7 and be relentless in our desire to work
8 together to make parks and recreation
9 centers clean, safe, and attractive. And
10 we commend you for having these hearings
11 to do so.

12 As one resident summed it up at
13 one of our meetings, prevention of crime
14 is everyone's responsibility, from block
15 captains to school guards to town watch.
16 And I will add it's the responsibility of
17 everyone in this room.

18 Thank you for your time and
19 your commitment to this critically
20 important issue.

21 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Thank you
22 for your testimony.

23 And before we go for questions,
24 we're going to hear from Mr. Murphy, if
25 that's okay with you, Councilman.

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MR. MURPHY: Good morning.

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Good morning, Councilwoman Cindy Bass.

4

How are you?

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COUNCILWOMAN BASS: I'm great.

6

How are you?

7

MR. MURPHY: And to the

8

distinguished panel.

9

COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Good to see

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you.

11

MR. MURPHY: My name is Anthony

12

Murphy and I'm the Executive Director of

13

Town Watch Integrated Services. Thank

14

you for the opportunity to appear before

15

you today.

16

The violence that has plagued

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our city and has become more increasingly

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at areas of refuge is symbolic of the

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violence in the City. This violence is

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having an impact in such a way that

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organizing more town watch groups and

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reaching out to motorcycle groups,

23

equestrian groups to recruit them into

24

town watch would increase the number of

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people participating in improving the

1

2 quality of life in the City of
3 Philadelphia.

4

5 I think it's fair to say that
6 all of us in this Chamber and indeed
7 across the City are incensed to see
8 images of young people victimized by the
9 acts of random and senseless violence.
10 We are equally disheartened to hear of
11 the innocent victims of this violence who
12 have been shot, including a two-year-old
13 child at a block party.

13

14 Being able to recruit, train,
15 and equip more people would be a major
16 effort, having them involved in
17 improvement of quality of life of our
18 communities.

18

19 The hours that the City
20 recreation centers have been increased to
21 provide a safe place for recreational
22 activities, and that's happening in our
23 neighborhoods. Have more adult
24 supervision through town watch groups
25 potentially using the centers as a base
26 of operation would only enhance the safe

1

2 environment at our recreation centers.

3

4 We currently have a few town
5 watch groups that monitor the parks and
6 recreation centers in their communities,
7 and as an example, we have a Juniata Park
8 Town Watch, Tacony/Tookany Creek Town
9 Watch, and we also have a town watch
10 group that covers Malcolm X Park in West
11 Philadelphia, and there are a few others.

12 But I also like to say, I still
13 play at a recreation center. I go there
14 on the weekends for recreation. I do
15 that in order to make sure I stay in
16 contact with young people throughout this
17 city to have a direct link to them. The
18 recreation center I play at is at 10th
19 and Olney. It's Cherashore Playground.
20 And on Sundays and on Saturdays and
21 usually when the basketball league is
22 there, they know that's Murphy's park.
23 We don't have an issue. And that's
24 because we take the same investment that
25 you heard about in Hunting Park.

I have a staff member that was

1

2 working with the Hunting Park group to
3 help develop the park watch for Hunting
4 Park so that they can be ambassadors.
5 What you don't want is have citizens
6 involved without proper training and
7 without proper equipment and then also
8 without the proper connections. And we
9 bring that. We also make sure that
10 there's information that the police sends
11 us, is distributed to town watch groups
12 and citizens that are part of our
13 information list across the City when
14 those things are given to us. And in the
15 future, I hope to even start a town watch
16 Twitter. So look for me on Twitter.

17 Thank you.

18 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Very good.
19 Very good. I like the sound of that.
20 And before I open it up for questions, I
21 want to say that you're the first person
22 that said that you actually use the parks
23 and recreation system, even though I know
24 a lot of people do, but you're the first
25 person who said that you are an active

1

2 user on a regular basis. And it's really
3 important. I have a three-year-old, and
4 myself and my husband and our daughter,
5 we go to the playgrounds in our district
6 all the time, and it's just good to be
7 out and to see what's going on. That's
8 another part of the issue. If you're not
9 there, you can't see some of the good
10 things that are going on and some of the
11 things that need improvement. So I'm
12 glad that you take advantage of these
13 amenities.

14 And, Councilman Jones, I know
15 you have some questions.

16 COUNCILMAN JONES: Anthony
17 Murphy is Tweeting.

18 I guess what I wanted to ask
19 about is, there -- and you are experts on
20 this, and I'm so encouraged about the
21 one-day seminar on public safety in our
22 parks, and we were just talking about we
23 can't wait to be a part of that.

24 There are varying aspects --
25 the way you guard Carroll Park, Rose

1

2 Playground -- we have a town watch out of
3 there I'm sure you're familiar with.

4 Overbrook Civic has that -- is different
5 than you would assess trails, Belmont
6 Plateau and then a whole series of horse,
7 cross country trails that we have.

8 So in your assessments, whether
9 it's town watch or whether it's in just
10 public safety from a park, are you
11 considering the very different ways that
12 you have to guard those places? And if
13 so, can you enlighten us on how you do a
14 Valley Green versus a Carroll Park or a
15 playground?

16 MS. GOLDENBERG: I can tell you
17 what we've heard in the community. We
18 are bringing these other cities --
19 experts from other cities and
20 professionals here to help answer those
21 very question questions, and I think our
22 police and our Park and Recreation staff
23 could probably answer that better than I
24 can, but we clearly hear from the
25 community, for example, in parklands,

1

2 heavily forested like the Wissahickon or
3 Belmont Plateau, that you do need people
4 in the parks. You need professionals
5 either on horseback, you need people
6 walking. It's a combination of
7 enforcement. It's a combination of
8 rangers, who are ambassadors, a uniformed
9 presence.

10 I know when I'm in the
11 Wissahickon all weekend long and I see a
12 lot of youth and adults swimming in the
13 creek and jumping off rocks, it's
14 constant and it's frightening. It's
15 people loving the park. It's people
16 wanting to enjoy the park, and we
17 certainly understand that, but they have
18 to do it in a way that's safe. And I
19 think more of a uniformed presence, not a
20 threatening necessarily, but education
21 would be helpful. I think more and more
22 things like lighting on trails is what we
23 heard from a lot of the citizens.

24 COUNCILMAN JONES: Motion
25 detectors maybe that would kick cameras

1

2 in upon motion? No? That's why I'm
3 going to leave it to you experts.

4

MR. MURPHY: A couple things.
5 I wouldn't use motion detectors in the
6 park. Lighting would be wonderful. I
7 don't know how practical that will be at
8 certain times. But where you have
9 trails, because you mentioned some
10 distinctions, we have trails that are
11 traveled particularly by people who ride
12 horses. Then you want to try to get them
13 involved, because they become a perfect
14 sets of eyes and ears by virtue of the
15 time that they spend there.

16

Where you have -- you mentioned
17 Belmont Plateau where you have actually
18 highways or roads that you can ride
19 through. We have town watch groups who
20 do that. They will go through a park,
21 because they take ownership.

22

The jumping in the creek,
23 that's purely informing young people as
24 well as adults that that's a danger in
25 doing it, and that's education. So when

1

2 you look at the different parks, we have
3 to look at the different populations, and
4 then you structure your information, and
5 also for me, my training would be
6 structured for that particular area that
7 we target.

8

MS. RICE: I was going to

9

add --

10

COUNCILWOMAN BASS: I know --

11

okay. You wanted to add something?

12

Because we're really running out of time

13

and we need to -- if you want to add

14

something really briefly, that would be

15

great.

16

MS. RICE: I was going to add

17

when you asked about parks, but the same

18

thing is with the recreation centers. If

19

you -- the more people that are there,

20

the safer the place is. We have found

21

that with staff, volunteers, if it's

22

active work going on, then the violence

23

is reduced. When it's empty and not

24

being used, it's a haven for the kinds of

25

things that went at Parkside-Evans.

1

2 Parkside-Evans is a clear indication of a
3 location that's deep in the park but
4 right there on the street. And they meet
5 and they do all kinds of things.

6

7

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9

10

So I think the City and the
Department look for programmatic
activities that they can make sure are
happening, and that alone helps to reduce
some violence.

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COUNCILMAN JONES: I guess in
your plan -- and I'll for brevity just
say that I'd like to see non-conventional
town watches utilize horses. We have at
least a half dozen cables in the park
system, and I know we're going to hear
from equestrians that are willing to, for
the cost of hay, take horses out, and
bikers that utilize the trails, because
certain -- I mean, unless you're a hiker,
biker or equestrian, there are parts of
the park that are remote and that are
harder to access. So we want to look at
the heavily populated sites, such as
recreation centers and plateaus, but also

1

2 when a jogger is in a trail in Valley
3 Green, they need to be safe as well.

4

COUNCILWOMAN BASS: And
5 actually can we go back for one second
6 and have you state your name for the
7 record, Ms. Rice.

8

MS. RICE: I'm sorry?

9

COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Can we have
10 you state your name for the record.

11

MS. RICE: Carol Rice, Park and
12 Rec Commission.

13

COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Thank you
14 very much. Thank you very much for your
15 testimony. We really appreciate it.

16

What we're going to do going
17 forward is -- I know we have a lot of
18 people left to testify and a number of
19 people who want to be moved up on the
20 list, and we're just not going to be able
21 to accommodate that because of the number
22 of people who want to go next. So we're
23 going to have to take folks in order. We
24 highly recommend that if you cannot stay,
25 we would love to review your testimony,

1

2 if you have it in written form, and we
3 would be happy to make sure that it's
4 circulated properly and that it is read
5 and certainly digested.

6

7 But going forward, we want to
8 have Ms. Sylvia Simms from Parent Power
9 Incorporated, Ms. Jill Gray from the
10 Mount Airy Bantams, and Mr. Patrick Jones
11 from the Northwest Raiders Organization.

12 (Witnesses approached witness
13 table.)

14 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Thank you
15 for being here. We're going to ask you
16 to limit your testimony to two minutes or
17 less. Thank you.

18 MS. SIMMS: Thank you.

19 COUNCILWOMAN SANCHEZ: Please
20 state your name for the record.

21 MS. SIMMS: Good morning. My
22 name is Sylvia Simms and I'm founder and
23 President of Parent Power. I'm also a
24 committee person for 11th Ward, 19th
25 Division.

I'm here today to talk about

1

2 our community. We don't have a
3 recreation center or a park that our
4 community can go to. The closest one is
5 across the street at Cecil B. Moore
6 Recreation Center.

7

8 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Where are
9 you located at?

9

10 MS. SIMMS: I live in the 2700
11 block of Opal Street.

11

12 The other one is Panati's,
13 which is at 22nd and Lippincott.

13

14 None of my community can go to
15 either side, fear of being murdered. And
16 we're just trying to get a resource
17 center, a small park where we can and our
18 children can go to play, because right
19 now they're playing in the streets all
20 day because they have nowhere to go. And
21 there are a lot of community partners
22 here that want to serve and help, but we
23 all need to work together and reach out
24 to each other.

24

25 That's all I have to say.

25

Thank you.

1

2

COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Thank you.

3

And Ms. Gray.

4

MS. GRAY: Good morning, City

5

Council.

6

COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Good

7

morning.

8

MS. GRAY: I'm Jill Gray,

9

Chairperson for the Mount Airy Bantams

10

Youth Association. We occupy football

11

and cheerleading organization. We occupy

12

four fields, recreational parks in

13

Philadelphia - Mount Airy Playground,

14

Sedgwick and Germantown, which is our

15

home field; Pleasant Playground; Awbury

16

Playground; and Mallery located at

17

Germantown -- I mean Johnson and Morton

18

Street.

19

For the most part, I think our

20

recreation centers do pretty well. I

21

haven't heard of any violence or -- and I

22

think it's because we occupy those

23

recreation fields with activities. The

24

only incident I can think of happened

25

last month with my nine-year-old son who

1

2 was playing with his friend and another
3 kid, maybe 10 or -- between 10 and 12
4 pulled a gun on him. And they weren't
5 sure whether it was a real gun or a
6 beebee gun. When we went around to
7 Mallery, it just so happens that two cop
8 cars were coming down the street, and my
9 husband and I held the cop cars, and they
10 took my husband and looked for the little
11 boy. And they couldn't find him, but I
12 can say that Lee, the supervisor at
13 Mallery, he did a good job. He knew who
14 the kid was, and he's still looking out
15 for the kid.

16 So I think that when you have
17 activities with a lot of parent activity
18 and volunteers, the crime is not as much.

19 Our organization, we have 55
20 coaches, maybe a little over. Some of
21 them are cops, attorneys, and they're all
22 over the field, all over four fields.
23 For the most part, I think our recreation
24 centers are pretty good.

25 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Very good.

1

2 Thank you.

3

MS. GRAY: Thank you.

4

COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Patrick

5

Jones, Northwest Raiders Organization.

6

MR. JONES: Yes. Good morning,

7

Councilwoman Bass, Councilman Jones,

8

Councilwoman Sanchez, and Councilman Oh.

9

Thank you for having me.

10

My testimony is -- my name is

11

Patrick Jones. I'm the Chairman for the

12

Northwest Raiders Athletic Association.

13

I'm also -- I'm sorry. Did I say

14

Chairman? I'm on the Board. I'm also a

15

committee person in the 8th Council

16

District, 59th Ward, and I coach football

17

and baseball.

18

We have a slight issue. Of

19

course, in any area that's economically

20

challenged, you're going to have crime.

21

However, we are adjacent to the Mount

22

Airy Bantams Association and we don't

23

have -- we have, I guess, a slightly

24

elevated crime issue in our rec center,

25

which is the Lonnie Young Recreation

1

2 Center. But because we have activities
3 and the rec center is attached to a youth
4 organization, I really think that that's
5 the cause for why we don't have as much
6 crime in our areas.

7

8 What I've heard some testimony
9 and some of the things that -- Councilman
10 Jones asked the question earlier about
11 youth organizations attaching themselves
12 to rec centers, and I think that that
13 really helps with crime. I mean, you
14 have mothers and fathers who are not just
15 mothers and fathers to their children but
16 also to other people's children. You
17 have single mothers and single fathers
18 who work all day and they can't be there
19 with their kids. So people like myself
20 and the two young ladies here, we can be
21 mothers and fathers to other people's
22 children, you know. We help -- we raise
23 our community, and without the community,
24 we can't be successful.

25

My organization is and the
organizations represented here are

1

2 testaments to how we positively influence
3 our communities. A lot of the
4 crime-riddled areas are areas without
5 sense of community. So we could try -- I
6 guess my experience is that we raise our
7 children and we know when something wrong
8 happens, we know who did it. One
9 incidence was, a few months ago a couple
10 kids broke into the rec center and
11 sprayed the fire extinguishers all over
12 the place. We know who did it, and we
13 were able to address it, to approach
14 those kids and to handle the issue
15 without, of course, without police but to
16 raise these kids. I mean, kids do stupid
17 things, and to let them know that that's
18 not the proper way to act and to
19 reintroduce them to what we call our
20 family.

21 So basically that's my
22 testimony.

23 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Well, thank
24 you for being here. I just want to say
25 that I know you all through your work in

1

2 the 8th District and all of the great
3 things that you've done, and with all
4 respect to everyone else who has
5 testified today, you are on the ground in
6 such a substantive way dealing with, like
7 you said, your children, other people's
8 children, the neighborhood, the
9 neighborhood issues and really are at the
10 forefront of everything that's happening
11 in the neighborhood and particularly, for
12 our discussion here today, at our rec
13 centers.

14 And so I just want to thank you
15 for being here, for taking time out of
16 your very busy schedule. You do a lot of
17 work. You're out there on the ground.
18 You're not paid. You're a volunteer.
19 You're not paid, are you? Anybody paid?
20 No. You're volunteering, and you're
21 doing a lot.

22 So I just really want to tell
23 you how much I appreciate you, how much
24 the entire City of Philadelphia
25 appreciates you and other people like you

1

2 who are doing the very important work on
3 the ground, like you said, with your
4 children and with other people's
5 children.

6

7 I happened to come out and see
8 the Raiders in action probably back in
9 October or November of last year on a
10 Tuesday night, a rainy night, over at
11 Lonnie Young, and there were probably
12 about 200 kids practicing football,
13 practicing cheerleading. And you would
14 just never know this activity was going
15 on, because it was the middle of the week
16 and it was raining outside, and you just
17 didn't expect to see so much activity
18 happening, and it was dark out.

18

19 So, again, I just want to
20 applaud all of you for all of the work
21 that you've done and the work that you
22 hopefully will continue to do. Thank you
23 so much for being here.

23

24 Councilman Jones.

24

25 COUNCILMAN JONES: Yes, Madam
26 Chair. I just want to for the record say

1

2 that we respect what Mount Airy Sports
3 Association has done, and those Raiders
4 are something special, but that ain't
5 going to help with the Monarchs of West
6 Philly.

7

8 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Don't

9

10 Thank you so much for being
11 here.

12

13 And next up to testify we have
14 Curtis LeBlanc from Cheney University.
15 Is Curtis still here? Lauren Bornfriend
16 from the Parks Alliance and Ms. Doris
17 Gwaltney from the Philadelphia Parks
18 Alliance also. And also why don't we
19 have Mr. Walter Martin come forward as
20 well with the Parks Alliance.

21

22 (Witnesses approached witness
23 table.)

24

25 MR. LeBLANC: Good morning,
26 Councilwoman Cindy Bass and everybody on
27 the Board.

28

29 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Good
30 morning, Curtis.

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MR. LeBLANC: Good morning,
ladies and gentlemen. My name is Curtis
LeBlanc. I'm going into my fourth year
at Cheney University.

I grew up in a single parent
home in Southwest Philadelphia. I had
four brothers from ages 7 to 26. I've
also traveled a lot of places around the
world.

Growing up in Philadelphia
wasn't one of the easiest things to do as
a child. Unlike other children in the
neighborhood, I had the opportunity of a
lifetime being able to go to school in
Northeast Philadelphia. While I attended
school in the Northeast, I learned a lot
of life lessons. I was around people of
all different nationalities and cultures,
those who I felt value life in the
community. Other parts of the City are
the complete opposite of that. Those
areas I find to be very negative. Young
people have no guidance, no direction.
Most like me grew up in single parent

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homes or other types of care.

As a young male, I learned a lot from my mother, but the things my father couldn't teach me most likely I learned from friends, families, educators, people or things around me.

In the City of Philadelphia, the culture differs from other areas. In some places people appreciate fine arts, sports, music, and religion. In Philadelphia, most people value violence, crime, and the fast life. A lot of young kids want to have everything they see on TV, money, cars, clothes, and et cetera, but don't want to do anything to achieve these things. They'll rather shoot someone's grand-mom in broad daylight to make a quick come up or stand on the street corners and sell drugs to make ends meet. All this does is weaken the community as a whole. We are hurting people and destroying people's lives in the process. We need more activities for the younger generation to be involved in. While I

1

2 was growing up, there were different
3 activities available to take part in,
4 from youth camps to DARE programs and rec
5 centers. All that is gone. Most schools
6 are even cutting arts, music, and
7 physical education programs. The parks
8 that we have are underdeveloped or crime
9 infested. In my opinion, the City is
10 responsible for some of what's going on.
11 The areas we have to socialize have to
12 security. I can speak on times I have
13 gone to play basketball at Kingessing
14 Playground, there were masses of people
15 out watching a basketball game.

16 Kingessing is known to have multiple
17 shootings every year. Why were there
18 only three cops on the opposite side of
19 the park far from where the activity was
20 taking place?

21 I know multiple stories of
22 violence which occur in the area. A
23 recent event was the shooting at Kimball
24 Park. These places are understaffed, and
25 you're letting people terrorize the

1

2 neighborhood when there is more that can
3 be done on the City's part to stop this
4 growing epidemic.

5 I am here because I have family
6 members or friends who have dodged a
7 bullet and have been blessed enough to
8 make it home to see their loved ones.

9 Thank you and please take the
10 necessary changes -- I mean, please take
11 the time to think about what I said and
12 make the necessary changes.

13 Thank you.

14 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Thank you.
15 Thank you for your testimony.

16 Lauren.

17 MS. BORNFRIEND: I was going to
18 say good morning, but good afternoon.

19 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Good
20 afternoon.

21 MS. BORNFRIEND: I'm Lauren
22 Bornfriend, the Executive Director of the
23 Philadelphia Parks Alliance. Thank you,
24 Councilwoman Bass and members of Council,
25 for your leadership about parks and

1

2 recreation and for holding this hearing
3 on violence today. It's very important.

4

5 I'm joined here today by two
6 people who I think are very important.
7 They're Board members of the Philadelphia
8 Parks Alliance. And every day these two
9 folks, among many others, make enormous
10 personal investments in Philadelphia's
11 parks and recreation, to its children, to
12 its adults, and to its neighborhoods.

13 Doris Gwaltney is the President of
14 Carroll Park Neighbors. Walter Marlin is
15 the President of Finley Recreation Center
16 Advisory Council. Both of them are on
17 the ground, neither of them are paid, and
18 both of them know a lot about this issue.

19 We understand that the issue of
20 violence at park and rec facilities is a
21 complex and a sensitive one. However, we
22 also know that chronic underfunding of
23 the Department of Parks and Recreation is
24 a key factor.

25 A 2009 report by the United
States Department of Justice defines

1

2 risky urban parks as a place where -- and
3 this is a quote -- "crime and disorder
4 such as vandalism, littering, dog
5 fouling, alcohol, drug abuse, and public
6 sex become the dominant activities."

7

8 This report further asserts that
9 inadequate maintenance can lead to
10 increased and more serious offenses by
11 sending the message to potential
12 criminals that no one cares and no one is
13 in charge.

14

15 We all know that despite the
16 heroic efforts of the Department of Parks
17 and Recreation, of its staff, of the
18 Police Department, of citizen volunteers
19 who donate more than \$5 million in sweat
20 equity per year, of the investment of
21 community groups and non-profits, like
22 the Conservancy and PHS and many others,
23 of foundations in the private sector, our
24 parks and recreation will never be safe
25 and clean facilities if the municipal
government does not invest in them.

26

Broken park benches, filthy

1
2 bathrooms, overflowing trash cans,
3 graffiti covered play equipment, water
4 dripping through light fixtures, and lack
5 of staff sends the message to
6 Philadelphia's young people and adults
7 that they don't matter.

8 And that's really a huge
9 concern.

10 It has been common sense for a
11 really long time, but research now
12 quantifies that cuts in park and staff
13 maintenance in times of fiscal crisis
14 create the opportunity for anti-social
15 behavior to become dominant. And that's
16 what I think this young man was just
17 talking about.

18 There's a step that can be
19 taken right now to begin to restore
20 funding to the Department of Parks and
21 Recreation. On June 24th, City Council
22 passed Bill No. 120489, which would add a
23 \$4 surcharge to tickets for parking
24 violations. While the Mayor has the sole
25 authority to direct spending to a

1

2 specific program, your bill clearly
3 states its intention that \$2 of each
4 ticket go to the General Fund for
5 maintenance at recreation centers. It's
6 estimated that a \$2 surcharge would
7 generate more than \$2 million a year.
8 Your bill that would deliver this new
9 revenue to Parks and Recreation that
10 could be used for this maintenance is
11 sitting right now on Mayor Nutter's desk,
12 and we really, really hope that he will
13 sign it, because we can begin to address
14 these issues.

15 Investing in our parks and
16 recreation is one of the ways to make
17 them safe for every citizen in every
18 neighborhood of this city.

19 Thank you.

20 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Thank you.
21 Thank you for your testimony.

22 Doris.

23 MS. GWALTNEY: Madam Chair and
24 Councilmembers, I'm Doris Gwaltney, the
25 President of Carroll Park Neighbors and a

1

2 Board member of the Philadelphia Parks
3 Alliance.

4

5 Of course there is crime in
6 Philadelphia's parks. Because of Carroll
7 Park's completion of its \$500,000
8 restoration project, our community
9 residents and the drug dealers and the
10 prostitutes can now enjoy visiting a
11 clean and attractive environment. In the
12 bad old days, these folks owned Carroll
13 Park. People walked across the street
14 from the park in the daytime. Today it
15 does not give us any comfort to know that
16 these particular visitors are now trying
17 to be discrete in plying their illicit
18 activities.

18

19 Residents come to the park to
20 host barbecues, family reunions, and
21 birthday parties, not to mention the
22 people who come over because it is a
23 clean and quiet place to be for an hour
24 or two. But you must walk past these
25 groups of young men who are doing what we
26 know they are doing.

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At night, the prostitutes entertain their clients near our tool shed. It's dark over there. Used condoms, discarded pantyhose, one time a pair of boxer shorts. In November, a young woman was assaulted and robbed in Carroll Park. The SVU unit came out to investigate because the man knocked her down and touched her before he fled with her pocketbook.

Area day care centers bring their children over to use the playground. All day long we can hear the laughter of happy children enjoying themselves, jumping rope, playing tag or just running about, being carefree as children do. But the reality of city life lurks about, thinking of future clients perhaps?

I warn the day care centers to keep their children in sight at all times. A little girl came to me one afternoon and told me that a man sitting on that bench over there offered to give

1

2 her some candy, and she said, I think he
3 might molest me. I went to the pathway
4 and stared at him until he finally got up
5 and left.

6

7 We know these men are there,
8 and they know we know, but we can't do
9 anything until they do something really,
really bad.

10

11 Yes, there is crime in our
12 city's parks. A park ranger walking
13 through at intervals would be a good
14 thing. Parks need pedestrian lights
15 along their dark pathways. So maybe the
16 City needs to find money for these
17 solutions before a Philadelphia park is
18 featured on "The 1st Forty-Eight." One
19 more dramatic story about "we never
thought it would happen here."

20

Thank you.

21

22 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Thank you
for your comments.

23

Mr. Marlin.

24

25 MR. MARLIN: To Council
President Darrell Clarke and associate

1

2 Councilmembers, Madam Chairwoman, it is
3 indeed a pleasure to come before you
4 today as a community volunteer of more
5 than 30 years at the Finley Recreation
6 Center and a recently initiated Board
7 member of the Philadelphia Parks
8 Alliance.

9

Our city's parks and recreation
10 infrastructures are crumbling. Parks and
11 Recreation staff and volunteers all over
12 the City are painfully aware of deferred
13 maintenance issues, which have been
14 reiterated numerous times here. It's my
15 opinion that all of these items lead to
16 more criminal activity, because criminals
17 know which doors are available for
18 escape. They know what windows they can
19 get into and out of and so forth. They
20 know where the hiding places are in the
21 rec centers and so forth almost as well
22 as the staff. So when an incident
23 happens, they commit their crime and
24 they're out the door very quickly, the
25 ones that are not locked.

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Our Parks and Recreation staff have been operating at this level for so long that our children and the general public are beginning to believe that this is the norm. Kudos to our Parks and Recreation administrators and staff for their continued efforts to provide meaningful programming at all facilities. It's very important.

Finley Rec Center has had its share of break-ins, burglaries, robberies. We've had lockers broken into, cash stolen, snack machines destroyed and vandalized, and a new shredder stolen from the office.

Vare Recreation Center, which has had security cameras installed recently, has reported that their surveillance program has witnessed a 99 percent drop in criminal activity.

Perhaps other centers would benefit from more lighting and surveillance systems.

The Finley Advisory Council has purchased its own hardware for a

1

2 surveillance system, because we can't
3 afford to wait for the City to get around
4 to providing a surveillance system for
5 our building. It's not a question of if
6 something will happen inside; it's a
7 question of when. And we don't want one
8 person, child or adult, to suffer at the
9 hands of some knucklehead because they
10 can get out the door very quickly.

11 Criminals are becoming more
12 aggressive at burglaries, sexual
13 assaults, shootings, and gunshots have
14 been heard in and around Finley at
15 various times during the evening, not
16 during the daytime so much, but they're
17 there. And, in our opinion, it's just a
18 matter of time before they come inside.

19 We want to -- Parks and
20 Recreation cannot provide adequate
21 services in your councilmanic districts
22 without your financial support. Parks
23 and Recreation cannot do it alone. We
24 ask you for dollars to expand
25 surveillance systems and lighting, proper

1

2 lighting or adequate lighting, in all rec
3 centers. Criminals somehow sometimes
4 don't want to appear either on camera or
5 in well-lit areas where there is
6 coverage. So I urge you, please consider
7 funding for maintenance, lighting, and
8 surveillance systems.

9

 Thank you for your time.

10

 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Thank you.

11

Thank you for your comments.

12

13 I just want to thank you for
14 being here today, for being so patient,
15 and for all of the information that you
16 brought forward.

16

17 Curtis, as a young person who
18 is actively using the system, you said
19 you have four brothers?

19

 MR. LeBLANC: Yes.

20

21 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: All in the
22 age range, I'm assuming, that would use
23 the parks and recreation system?

23

 MR. LeBLANC: Yes.

24

25 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: So it's
 very good to have your perspective.

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10

And also with all of you with the Parks Alliance, hearing your commentary and your thoughts and your experience and what you've seen, what you know, it's all very critical. So we certainly take your comments under advisement. Thank you very much for being here today. Thank you for being here.

11

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16

Next up we're going to have Mr. Mark Kearney from the Philadelphia Parks Alliance and Friends of Cloverly Park; Ms. Mia Byrd, Friends of Vernon Park. Is she here? Mr. David Fisher from Tioga Baseball. Is he here?

17

(No response.)

18

19

COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Mr. Mike Walsh, District Council 47.

20

(No response.)

21

22

23

24

COUNCILWOMAN BASS: No. Moving right along. Mr. Michael McCrea. And Mr. McCrea is from the Recreation Advisory Council.

25

(Witnesses approached witness

1

2 table.)

3

4 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: And why
don't we start with you, Mr. Kearney.

5

6 (Witnesses approached witness
table.)

7

8 MR. KEARNEY: Good afternoon.

9

10 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Good
11 afternoon.
12 MR. KEARNEY: My name is Mark
13 Kearney. I'm the Co-President of the
14 Friends of Cloverly Park in West
15 Germantown.

16 It has taken 26 years of effort
17 by a diligent group of neighbors working
18 in collaboration with the dwindling
19 resources of the then Fairmount Park
20 Commission to transform Cloverly Park
21 from a neglected, debris-filled site of
22 criminal activity into the
23 well-maintained, welcoming, and
24 award-winning place it is today. We
25 understand fully the benefit of a
neighborhood park that is adequately
supported, maintained, and used in a

1

2 constructive manner versus one that is
3 not. This is not to say that there
4 aren't challenges. My home shares a
5 border with the park, and I am intimately
6 aware of activities that occur on a
7 regular basis.

8

9 From my experience, the issue
10 of violence in park and rec facilities
11 hinges on a fundamental question, that
12 being who is responsible for enforcing
13 the regulations of the Department and,
14 more importantly, do they do so?

15 Along with drug activities and
16 prostitution, inappropriate behaviors
17 that can tend toward violence are often
18 taken to park and rec sites where those
19 involved know that the likelihood of
20 being challenged is slim. Park and rec
21 facilities are often used as party sites,
22 where attendees disregard regulations,
23 leave the site in disarray and are
24 inconsiderate of residents in the
25 immediate area.

26 The Department has a small

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corps of rangers who are quite responsive. However, their numbers are few, their hours are limited, and they are often not accessible.

One would assume that the police would be the primary resource. However, in my area of the City, this has proven not to be the case. Calls to 9-1-1 about illegal activity, suspicious behavior, and clear violations of posted regulations usually don't receive a response at all. Blatant drug activity, prostitution, and other unruly behaviors that are visible to any passer-by don't warrant even a slow down if a patrol car should pass. Senior police officials and Parks and Rec management have stated that of course the police are responsible. I question if this responsibility has been embraced by all. Case in point: A few years ago when it took in excess of 30 calls by residents to 9-1-1 about a disturbance in Cloverly, the annoyed sergeant who finally arrived stated that

1

2 the police were not responsible for
3 enforcing park rules. They weren't aware
4 of them. They didn't have the proper
5 training or the directive to enforce
6 them. And I quote, "The police police
7 the streets and somebody else does the
8 parks." He maintained that the police
9 only enter the parks in the event of
10 violent crime.

11 To address issues of violence
12 in park and rec facilities, City
13 management needs to clearly define who is
14 responsible for policing these sites.
15 Whoever this is needs to be given the
16 directive, the resources, proper
17 training, and a clear charge of being
18 accountable for enforcing regulations,
19 being visible, engaged, supportive, and
20 proactive.

21 Thank you.

22 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Thank you.
23 Thank you for your comments. Before we
24 go any further, I just want to just to be
25 clear and on the record, Sue, could you

1

2 tell us who is responsible for policing
3 the parks for the security? Is it the
4 Philadelphia Police Department?

5

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SLAWSON:

6

Well, the Police Department is not
7 responsible just for the parks. We have
8 rangers that also are in our parks.

9

MR. KEARNEY: I'm very well --

10

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SLAWSON:

11

It's a combination of those.

12

MR. KEARNEY: I mean, my issue

13

is that if you can get to the rangers,

14

they're very, very responsive, but

15

there's only a few of them.

16

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SLAWSON:

17

Councilwoman Bass, we only have 19

18

rangers in our parks, where there used to

19

be hundreds prior to --

20

COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Sue, I'm

21

sorry. Can you come forward for the

22

stenographer. She needs to be able to

23

hear you in the microphone.

24

(Witness approached witness

25

table.)

1

2

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SLAWSON:

3

Susan Slawson.

4

COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Thank you.

5

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SLAWSON:

6

And so it's the responsibility of the

7

rangers as well as the City of

8

Philadelphia Police Department to patrol

9

the park. Of course we know that because

10

of cuts that we don't have mounted. We

11

don't have the Police Department where

12

they used to patrol a certain area of

13

Fairmount Park.

14

MR. KEARNEY: I'm well aware of

15

that. I've been working with this for 15

16

years. My issue -- I agree with you.

17

The park ranger staff is incredibly

18

supportive. When you can get in touch

19

with them, they are engaged. They will

20

address disturbances. My issue is

21

there's, as you said, 19 of them. They

22

have limited hours. You can't always get

23

in touch with them. If you call 9-1-1 in

24

my area, nobody will come.

25

COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Well, the

1

2 first thing is, we want to just be clear
3 in terms of who is responsible for the
4 issues.

5

6

MR. KEARNEY: That's what
everybody says. I agree.

7

8

9

10

11

12

13

COUNCILWOMAN BASS: So I think
what we should do from here is because
you're in my district, I'd be happy to
meet with you and the Friends of Cloverly
Park and figure out what it is that is
missing, how can we make sure that we get
the sort of coverage that we need.

14

15

16

MR. KEARNEY: And we have a
number of issues going on with that
particular police district.

17

18

19

20

21

22

23

24

COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Okay. And
one of the things that we stated earlier
too is because we do have good working
relationships with the police district,
but if you feel that you're not getting
the attention or service that you need,
then that's something that we want to be
aware of.

25

But beyond that, one of the

1
2 folks who spoke earlier discussed the
3 idea of a park watch, and that might be
4 something to explore as well. So I think
5 maybe we could talk offline a little bit
6 about some of these issues in the
7 district.

8 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SLAWSON:

9 And if I could just make the statement
10 that depending on the type of call that
11 you're making, it would not be for our
12 park rangers to respond. It would be a
13 Philadelphia Police Department officer
14 that should respond to that. And one of
15 the things, putting on my other hat, one
16 of the things that has helped us with the
17 Police Department is that we've been able
18 to give them specific information to give
19 them the dates, the times, and specific
20 locations that we know that the
21 intelligence will allow them to be more
22 pointed and more focused on what's going
23 on, and that may assist you as well in
24 working with them and getting them to
25 address some of the issues that you're

1

2 having in the park. Not that I'm
3 speaking for them, but it's helped.

4 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Okay. All
5 right. Very good. Thank you.

6 Next we're going to have
7 Ms. Mia Byrd, Friends of Vernon Park.
8 But we are going to ask folks to really
9 just give us a summary of their comments,
10 because we are running out of time, and I
11 know that a number of members of Council
12 actually have some obligations this
13 afternoon and commitments that they have
14 to be at. So we're asking that you would
15 summarize in one minute, if you can, your
16 comments. We would greatly appreciate
17 it.

18 MS. BYRD: Good afternoon and
19 thank you. My name is Mia Byrd and I'm a
20 mother, I'm a neighbor, I'm a friend of
21 Vernon Park, and I'm a volunteer. Just
22 to summarize and to just keep into what
23 you would like us to focus on, one of the
24 things that I wanted to say is that being
25 a parent and going to a neighborhood park

1

2 today could literally mean going to war
3 and risking life and limb. It might seem
4 a bit heavy, but when you see the things
5 that are going on in our parks and the
6 things that you have to face very often
7 just being a parent and just going to
8 have fun, it becomes about teaching
9 moments, and it feels more like a social
10 experiment than just enjoying a public
11 space.

12 Very often I see countless
13 grandmothers in the role of a primary
14 caregiver, who to me are showing us the
15 example of embracing what it means to --
16 that it takes a village and how they're
17 standing in the gap for their families
18 and pushing themselves to limit just to
19 be able to be in that position. I think
20 that they show us a way to -- a solution
21 that we have to stand in the gap.
22 Sometimes there's not -- mom is not there
23 or dad is not there. And I loved what
24 the gentleman said earlier about
25 parenting other people's children,

1

2 because that's what it takes very often.

3

4 I just wanted to say that I am

5

6 thankful for you, Councilwoman Bass,

7

8 because you are a compassionate woman,

9

10 and I remember once being very

11

12 frustrated, because this issue of Vernon

13

14 Park has been an issue in our family for

15

16 a very long time, and I remember once

17

18 being so overwhelmed at the graffiti and

19

20 the cussing and the urination and

21

22 everything else that I was going -- years

23

24 ago I was going to march into the

25

26 official's office across the street and

27

28 just mother on the edge, let it out. And

29

30 I'm glad that I didn't. Number one,

31

32 because I was on my daughter's clock, and

33

34 she didn't need to see that, but also I

35

36 thank God for this opportunity, because

37

38 instead of barging in, I was welcomed and

39

40 I was invited by, again, a compassionate

41

42 woman who cares enough about our

43

44 children, about our community, about our

45

46 city to do something.

47

48 So I just wanted to celebrate

1

2 you for that and thank you for that.

3

4 And the last thing, just if
5 nothing else, I wanted to offer the
6 solutions very quickly that I at least
7 have. With that, I think it's possible
8 for us to elicit the help of local
9 churches, businesses, and communities,
10 community organizations with common
11 causes in addition to government;
12 allowing them to minister, to enforce, to
13 operate, and to work their missions in
14 the park freely and obtain wisdom on how
15 they handle violence respectively.

15

16 Another one is I think that the
17 consistent use of parks as public spaces,
18 making it more user friendly to the
19 community, local moms clubs, senior
20 activities, children's programming,
21 Vernon Park meet-up groups. That's a big
22 thing. But initiatives from the
23 Fairmount Park Commission that make parks
24 as a public space more user friendly when
25 we have to interface with the City to get
26 things done. And service-industry

1

2 friendly parks. Parks serve a purpose
3 and they serve people. So without
4 interruption of the natural and simple
5 purpose and order of a park, just to add
6 people and activity as a deterrent to
7 violence; incorporating complementary
8 services like advertising, entertainment,
9 food service. I have a food truck. Food
10 trucks, hospitality, tourism, and much
11 more to bring liveliness to the space.

12 So, again, I just thank you for
13 this and I thank you for the time.

14 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Absolutely.
15 Thank you for being here and for your
16 testimony. I really appreciate it.

17 Mr. McCrea.

18 MR. MCCREA: Thank you. I will
19 try to summarize a little bit, although I
20 seem to always get stuck at the end of
21 these lists and I'm always stuck
22 summarizing three pages into a page and a
23 half. But I'll make it interesting.

24 My name is Michael McCrea. I'm
25 President of the Philadelphia Recreation

1

2 Advisory Council. I'm on the Executive
3 Board of my local advisory council at the
4 Feltonville Youth Access Center. I'm a
5 civil engineer and part-time pig farmer.

6

7 Summarizing down, I think one
8 of the easiest ways and probably quickest
9 ways to take increased security at our
10 facilities is restoration of the \$8
11 million from our dedicated funding that
12 we didn't get last year or for the last
13 couple of years that's been cut. Also
14 the \$20 million in parking tax that was
15 designated for Parks and Recreation that
16 we still haven't gotten.

16

17 I submitted my copy of my
18 testimony to you, and you'll see the list
19 of all the reductions, staffing
20 reductions, specifically related to the
21 budget cuts over the last three years.
22 Did you guys get that?

22

COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Yes.

23

24 MR. McCREA: As you can see,
25 the numbers pertain to program staff who
26 work on the front lines of these issues

1

2 every day. Full-time program staff went
3 from 239 to 206, and at one point it was
4 at 197 last summer, the lowest number in
5 recent memory.

6

Our summer RSI position went
7 from 400 to 292. And these are mostly
8 positions that support our summer camps.

9

During the school year, our
10 after-school RSI position went from 144
11 to 66, but we received grant funding from
12 the Greater Philadelphia Urban Affairs
13 Coalition to hire 40 more, bringing that
14 number to 106.

15

Our general RSI positions
16 through the school year were reduced from
17 70 to 40. And in 2009, we actually had
18 275 recreation aide trainee positions
19 available in the summer for teens from
20 ages 14 to 18 to support our summer camps
21 and other school time activities, and,
22 again, all those positions were
23 eliminated and those jobs no longer
24 exist.

25

The restoration of those listed

1

2 positions would be the fastest and
3 probably the most effective way to
4 improve security at our facilities. More
5 eyes and ears at every facility would
6 increase the likelihood that the issues
7 would be addressed prior to them becoming
8 incidents. And prevention is certainly
9 preferred to reaction after the fact.

10 Gun violence is a citywide
11 issue and individual community issue.
12 There is not much we can do as a
13 department to address the gunman firing
14 into a crowded recreation center. While
15 we can, to some extent, control keeping
16 weapons out of our facilities, we have
17 little control of the surrounding
18 communities.

19 Our primary goal is to provide
20 activities for youth of all ages to keep
21 them off the streets and to operate our
22 facilities as safe havens within every
23 community. If our centers are crowded
24 and full of activities, our children feel
25 safe and we have ultimately accomplished

1

2 an important part of our goal. If our
3 centers are empty, then children have
4 nothing to attract them and they'll be
5 looking out for opportunities on the
6 street.

7

Restoring the staffing levels
8 is the one area that would directly
9 relate to the issue at hand. More staff
10 means more activities, and more
11 activities means more kids off the
12 street. It's not rocket science; it's
13 just common sense. And I'm a little
14 disappointed that the majority of people,
15 not everybody, but the majority was
16 all -- the testimony I heard today -- and
17 I've sat and listened to all of it -- was
18 reactive, not preventative. I mean,
19 preventative is a big part of what we do.
20 I mean, part of our success -- and I
21 don't know at my own facility -- is that
22 we engage the kids every day. We have
23 people out on the street with us,
24 volunteers as well as staff, that engage
25 the kids every day and getting them into

1
2 the center for something that they
3 appreciate and something that they want
4 and something that they put a value on.
5 And once they put a value on it, they
6 become stakeholders. Once they become
7 stakeholders, they're going to protect
8 what they have, and they're going -- I've
9 seen it happen. I've been 26 years.
10 I've seen this happen. They will in
11 turn, to a certain extent, police
12 themselves, because they don't want
13 somebody else coming in and ruining their
14 thing. Whatever their thing happens to
15 be, if you have something that they value
16 and put a value on, they don't want
17 anybody ruining that. They're going, to
18 a certain extent, police themselves and
19 not let their friends come in and do
20 something stupid that's going to close
21 the recreation center down for two weeks
22 because something happened like that,
23 whether it's gun violence or whatever it
24 is. And that's what's going to be. If
25 you don't engage them -- and in order to

1
2 do that, you need more people on the
3 street. And if you just look at the
4 numbers, I mean, you can see how many
5 less people we have just in the last two
6 years. And that's just putting us back
7 where we were. We're not asking for more
8 money. We're asking just give us back
9 what we had. And that's dedicated
10 funding that we had every year. And now
11 part of that is replaced by grant
12 funding, and that's funding that we can't
13 necessarily count on. But you get the
14 bodies and you get the people in there --
15 all those other things are great and I
16 appreciate them and I understand cameras
17 and all those other things, but that's
18 all reactionary, things that are
19 happening after the fact. These are
20 things we can do on the street right now
21 today. We could restore that money. We
22 can hire these people. We can put on
23 here, and every place is going to be
24 safer. And my good friend for a long
25 time, Carol Rice, said the same thing,

1

2 along with Nancy Goldenberg. That's what
3 the research bore out, and we've known
4 that for a long time. A full center,
5 it's full of people, is going to be safer
6 than any center that isn't.

7

COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Absolutely.
8 Well, thank you for your commentary. We
9 really appreciate it. Thank you for
10 being here today.

11

And we will follow up with you
12 as well. Thank you so much.

13

And next up we have Mr. Ike
14 Johnstone. Is he still here?

15

(No response.)

16

COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Are you
17 Ike?

18

MS. GODFREY: No.

19

COUNCILWOMAN BASS: You're
20 representing Ike?

21

MS. GODFREY: Yes.

22

COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Thank you.
23 Mr. Raymond Gant and Ms. Tessa
24 Rensman.

25

MS. RENSHAW: Renshaw.

1

2

COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Renshaw.

3

Okay.

4

(Witnesses approached witness

5

table.)

6

COUNCILWOMAN BASS: And so

7

we're going to ask once again that you be

8

very brief, if you could limit your

9

testimony to one minute. Just give us a

10

summary of your thoughts and ideas and

11

how we can address this issue.

12

We can start with the young

13

lady who is representing Mr. Johnstone.

14

Can you state your name for the record,

15

please.

16

MS. GODFREY: Sure. My name is

17

Misty Godfrey and --

18

COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Say again.

19

MS. GODFREY: Misty Godfrey.

20

I'm on the Advisory Board for the Bill

21

Picket Riding Academy, and I just want to

22

say it's quite an honor to be here today

23

and represent our equestrian community.

24

I have been an equestrian since I was a

25

young child. I started in Cobbs Creek

1

2 Park and I went to West Park, and now I'm
3 currently in the Wissahickon. So I'm
4 very passionate about our park, and it
5 was a haven for me as a child. It's a
6 haven for me as an adult.

7

8 And I want to say something
9 about what the gentleman just said about
10 some preventive maintenance as opposed to
11 our reactions after things have happened.
12 And one thing that I do is a lot of youth
13 mentoring through unique equestrian
14 activities, and I have to say for me as a
15 child, it was a way to -- we were kept
16 busy. There was a lot of accountability
17 and responsibility in taking care of
18 animals. And so that's one way I would
19 like to see us continue this equestrian
20 culture and get our youth involved and
21 have them take pride in our park as a lot
22 of our adults do.

23

24 And in terms of mediating some
25 of the things that we have going on in
our parks now, we were talking about -- I
hear people talking about equestrian

1

2 riders going into the trails and so
3 forth, and we have a lot of that going
4 on, but we would like to kind of just
5 make that more of a robust presence,
6 especially in West Park. There's a big
7 presence in the Wissahickon area. I also
8 manage the Monastery Stables. But in
9 West Park, our culture has really shrunk.
10 So I would like to just go through a huge
11 initiative to revitalize that culture in
12 that area and just get the public
13 involved as equestrian sports as an
14 activity, the same way people go bowling.
15 Then we can have more volunteers on these
16 committees, go out and ride in the
17 evenings and whatever the initiatives may
18 be for them to do that. But we would
19 love to be a part of that policing of the
20 parks.

21 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Okay.

22 Thank you very much.

23 And Mr. Gant.

24 MR. GANT: Good afternoon, City
25 Council.

1

2

COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Good

3

afternoon.

4

MR. GANT: My name is Raymond

5

Gant. I'm a President and co-founder of

6

a non-profit organization called the Ray

7

of Hope Project.

8

You know, I've been just

9

sitting here and just listening to all

10

the information that's been going around

11

today, and when we want to start talking

12

about the safety and crime that's in our

13

parks, I do a number in numerous, many

14

parks here in the City of Philadelphia.

15

And one of the biggest challenges that

16

I've had, because in the last ten years

17

that I've been doing this work, has been

18

in Kensington. Kensington with McPherson

19

and places like Hissey Playground are

20

very challenging areas in the City.

21

I got to say that the Police

22

Department do the very best that they can

23

in what they're doing and what they're up

24

against, but then, you know, you have

25

people there that's, you know, from the

1

2 community that has activity going on in
3 this community that goes beyond what they
4 can really control all over those
5 districts right there where they come
6 from.

7

8 There's something more needed
9 in those areas, particularly around the
10 parks, because when the parks in those
11 areas just get neglected or no longer
12 where people want to get involved because
13 of all the activity, they just -- they
14 get thrown by the wayside. You got
15 parks and playing areas right now that's
16 in that area that if people don't step up
17 to take ownership of them -- and we
18 talking about people that's already just,
19 you know, going through some things from
20 their community, period, and they really
21 don't want to get involved with a lot of
22 stuff because of the activity that's in
23 the neighborhoods, that's in those
24 communities. And the thing is is that
25 why do the children have to be the one to
suffer for the circumstances that they're

1

2 born into?

3

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25

So my thing is is that if we can find a way to get some other added security to assist the police, because I be down there all the time in Kensington, because that's where most of my work is being done at, and I mean people is like out in the broad daylight, you know, still doing they dope right on the McPherson or Hissey Playground, wherever we playing or wherever we working at.

We just had an event Saturday in one of the hottest areas in that area, and the whole time that it was police activity and police presence around there, folks were still wheeling and dealing. So this is what it is.

So in order for the safety of our children that has to be in this here environment, there needs to be something more that will help the police secure those areas so they can come and play.

People are literally held hostage in their own homes. They don't

1

2 even let their children come out to play
3 in those facilities because there's so
4 much paraphernalia and different things
5 in there, you know. And we go in there
6 and we clean them up and we do all the
7 things that we have to do and get people
8 involved in this whole process. And I
9 know we put a lot of reliance on the
10 community, but I don't see nobody in
11 these areas that I'm in right now being a
12 part of a town watch.

13 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Okay.

14 MR. GANT: Because most of the
15 people down there are not part of the
16 solution. A lot of them are part of the
17 problem.

18 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Okay.

19 MR. GANT: So I will say better
20 security would have to be something that
21 parks and rec. And then to leave the
22 parks like they are, because you got
23 McPherson, you got Hissey's, you got a
24 park right there at Ontario and Philips
25 that's unattended. Then you got Maguire.

1

2 And Lord knows, these places here can use
3 all the help they can get from wherever
4 Parks and Rec is at. That's all I'm
5 saying.

6

COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Okay.

7

8 MR. GANT: Wherever they at,
they need to step up they game.

9

COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Okay.

10

MR. GANT: Thank you.

11

12 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Thank you
for your testimony. We appreciate it.

13

And Ms. Renshaw.

14

15 MS. RENSHAW: Yes. Hello.
16 Thank you for having me. I am the
17 Community Outreach Manager for the
18 Friends of the Free Library of
19 Philadelphia. I do get paid for that
20 position, although I've kind of adopted
21 this neighborhood in Kensington and
22 working with the Friends of Hissey
23 Playground as well and using my activism
24 to help neighbors unite and have a voice
25 again. So that's more in my free time,
but I want to put that out there.

1

2

I have been working with

3

McPherson Square. It has Andrew Carnegie

4

Library in the middle of it in

5

Kensington. The initiative -- the first

6

time I walked in the park was a year ago,

7

and I walked into this park because there

8

was a meeting for Parks and Rec to plant

9

131 trees in this park. When I first

10

walked in and I saw what was going on, I

11

looked around at the people at the table

12

and I said, 131 trees? I'm going to need

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131 lights. And at that time, I

14

understood that they were just going to

15

plant those trees and go, and there

16

wasn't even a trash can in that park at

17

that time.

18

McPherson Square is also known

19

as Needle Park. A question I would like

20

answered is the amount of needles that

21

these kids can even go in the grass for,

22

nobody feels responsible for picking them

23

up. The police, Parks and Rec. It needs

24

to be addressed so these kids can walk in

25

the grass. This is a common thing they

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2 should have. Not to mention that this
3 park is a gem for this community that is
4 definitely in need of some TLC, and the
5 many parks in that area are gems, and
6 they're gems they have to survive. And
7 the one park with a library in the middle
8 of it has been ignored and neglected time
9 again.

10 They told me to get out
11 community residents, organized. Then
12 they'll start to do stuff. I did that.
13 I brought out residents. Thank you,
14 Councilwoman Maria Quinones-Sanchez. She
15 donated \$100,000 to put lights in this
16 park.

17 We got programming. I got a
18 \$15,000 grant to do a teen room. Things
19 are changing. Things are going, right?
20 I did my part. The residents do their
21 part. They have to come to all these
22 meetings. I'm a single mother and I
23 work, and it's hard. But they came out
24 time and time again.

25 Recently, I went to go check on

1

2 the park, which I do often. There was
3 trees planted, but with residents being
4 involved in the process. Although once
5 again, I walked in and there's users
6 everywhere. There's users -- it's almost
7 like being in a scary movie of zombies
8 and these kids just play around it like
9 it's normal. It's not. We have spoken
10 out and had meetings where police have
11 showed up, Parks and Rec showed up. Yes,
12 we're going to do this. We're going to
13 do that. We're going to do this. We're
14 going to have a plan, and nothing is
15 done.

16 The Councilwoman has done her
17 part. The residents have done their
18 part. And this is just one story of many
19 that I know. And it's time for the
20 collaborations and the pipelines to be --
21 the communication be there to effectively
22 fulfill them. Just to show up at a
23 meeting, actually have a safety plan,
24 some kind of organized idea that can help
25 certain gems. I'm not saying every park

1

2 and rec center, but the one with the
3 library in the middle of it, can we
4 please just have it for those kids? And
5 that might mean -- a 24-hour surveillance
6 at a pool? Well, a 24-hour surveillance
7 at McPherson Square Library so those kids
8 can safely go in and come out of their
9 own library and not witness what they
10 have to see.

11 I kind of went a little bit off
12 of what I had written down initially.
13 I'm just going to speak from my heart.

14 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: That's all
15 right.

16 MS. RENSHAW: But I would --
17 one question is -- even when I pull up
18 with my son and we get out, he doesn't
19 understand he can't run in the grass. I
20 got to grab him. That's how very severe
21 the number of needles are. They can't
22 effectively even play.

23 There needs to be -- I'm sure
24 other parks -- I haven't heard anyone
25 mention needles from any other park at

1

2 this time, but there really needs to be a
3 plan of what that, I guess, crime or
4 safety plan should be just for needle
5 pickup in itself. And I have asked
6 different agencies. I have gone to
7 Prevention Point, who gives out the
8 needles. I've asked Parks and Rec.
9 Everyone points the finger at everyone
10 else who needs to clean them up. But you
11 know who is cleaning them up? Those
12 children before they play football. They
13 know how to pick them up. Oh, no, you
14 just pick it up like this. And they put
15 it in the trash can that was just put
16 there.

17 So I guess our first step would
18 be is to not allow them to have to pick
19 up their needles before they want to play
20 football, and really start a process that
21 is going to make some valuable change.
22 The least we can do is protect these gems
23 in our community that are going to affect
24 the livelihood of the future of that
25 neighborhood.

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2

Thank you for having me.

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COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Thank you for being here, and I just -- I know the Councilwoman wants to add something for the record.

7

8

MR. GANT: Can I say one more thing, one more little thing?

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COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Little thing.

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MR. GANT: It's going to be little.

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COUNCILWOMAN SANCHEZ: Ray is not little.

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MR. GANT: The same way that we got security down here to moving homeless from being in certain areas, in this challenging part of Kensington, this is the same type of initiative that needs to be in that area, because these children are literally, I'm telling you, are being held hostage in their own home. They might as well be in Beirut. They might as well be in Afghanistan. They might as well be in Iraq, because they can't come

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2 out and enjoy the places that's been
3 provided for them. And then after they
4 get run down as much as they are now and
5 people got to come and to take ownership
6 of them, you know, they want to put the
7 money every place else because people
8 don't, you know, come out and use them.
9 Well, people are starting to come back
10 out. We need the services down there to
11 provide what these children need in that
12 area.

13 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Well,
14 again, I just want to thank you for
15 bringing it to our attention, to my
16 attention. As the Chair of this
17 Committee, I certainly want to know, and
18 that we can't get to solutions if we
19 don't know about some of these issues
20 that are going on.

21 I know that the Councilwoman
22 has been actively engaged in her district
23 and trying to always fighting for
24 additional resources, limited resources.
25 And the situation that you describe

1
2 unfortunately is not necessarily unique
3 to that one particular area. The needles
4 may be unique, but there are
5 unfortunately far too many areas of our
6 city where parents will not allow their
7 children out to a park or recreation
8 center because they feel unsafe. And
9 it's not just in Kensington. I received
10 an e-mail or a copy of an e-mail that was
11 circulating probably about two weeks ago
12 where someone said very similar things
13 about a recreation center in Chestnut
14 Hill. "Don't send your children here.
15 Something happened with my child. Don't
16 send your children here." And that's one
17 of the worst possible things that we
18 could have happening in our city, is that
19 we have a -- what I believe has the
20 potential to be one of the best parks and
21 recreation systems in the country and
22 that we would have parents who do not
23 feel safe enough to want to send their
24 children out to be a part of it, to go
25 with their children, to be engaged in the

1

2 system. So obviously it's very much
3 problematic.

4 I know the Councilwoman wanted
5 to add --

6 MS. RENSHAW: Can I just say
7 one last thing real quick?

8 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: We really
9 do have to move on, but I'm just going to
10 allow that one thing and then the
11 Councilwoman.

12 MS. RENSHAW: I talked to a
13 couple of the users a few days ago who
14 was in the center of the park and I said,
15 Why here? Why does it have to be here?
16 And they explained to me that it's easier
17 to be in the interior, so when the cops
18 drive by, they can just drop whatever
19 they have. So it's kind of a safe haven.

20 So foot patrol on the ground,
21 you can drive by as many times as you
22 want. In many of these parks and recs,
23 the security is what's going to be vital
24 to making change. That's it.

25 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Okay.

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COUNCILWOMAN SANCHEZ: Thank

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you. I just wanted for the record really

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thank -- Ray has been our ray of hope in

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the 7th Councilmanic District and his

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adoption of the Kensington neighborhood.

7

I think both Tessa's frustration and

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Ray's frustration is so valid. There's

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so many great people in this neighborhood

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who believe the conditions in which they

11

live are normal. And we do have a lot of

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gems there. Not just McPherson. Whether

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it's Hissey Park at C and Indiana that

14

was closed when I first got elected or

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Reed or Coraso Park or Schmidt that we're

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in the process of renovating. For some

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folks, this is all they have, and when we

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do not take care of it for them, they

19

believe it's a reflection of our

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deliberate neglect of these communities.

21

And so I just really want to

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thank them. I think that we will

23

continue to work with the Recreation

24

Department and their personnel and

25

continue to challenge ourselves with the

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2 private donors. I know Kathryn was
3 speaking here earlier about Hunting Park
4 and McPherson from the Fairmount Park
5 Conservancy. But McPherson is -- we've
6 made a lot of successes. There are a lot
7 of hands on board on this, and it is an
8 issue of coordination and facilitation,
9 and it's a long term. I mean, I'm in it
10 for the long haul. I think Captain Vogt
11 is in it for the long haul.

12 I think we sometimes create
13 some bureaucracies internally to our
14 processes that leads to this level of
15 frustration, whether it's the lighting
16 that we wanted this year that has to
17 start in September or October. You know,
18 I stand just as frustrated, and I'll tell
19 you, Commissioner Slawson stands just as
20 frustrated at the bureaucracy involved
21 with the capital investment. Once we get
22 the money allocated, get it approved, get
23 it on the ground, all of those things I
24 can assure you are not -- are the parts
25 of the jobs that we hate.

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But as long as I'm elected, I'm going to continue to challenge ourselves and this department, as I have from day one, to pay attention to these rec centers. I think between the Greenworks plan, some of the stuff that the Water Department is doing, I think we have an opportunity to show folks that we care, and hopefully you guys will inspire other folks to come up and step up to the plate.

We found that there're just incredible people there who have felt hopeless, and if I thought it was hopeless, I would not run for office. It is not hopeless. I can tell you that we will do our part as you continue to do your part to challenge us every single day. And that's why when Ray calls, I go out, and I've met with many, many neighbors, and we're going to get there. It's just going to take us a little bit of time. We want the staff to be sensitive to the cultural diversity that

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2 exists on the ground, to the changing
3 needs of our rec centers. What was
4 popular 50 years ago, as the Commissioner
5 mentioned before, is not popular now, and
6 how do we evolve, whether it's the hand
7 ball courts that we're looking at, the
8 soccer. How do we make these parks
9 intergenerational and safe, and people
10 are what's going to make it safe. Police
11 presence is important, but I really
12 believe it's just people and people not
13 allowing certain things and not accepting
14 certain things anymore.

15 So I want to thank the
16 Chairwoman. I know she's very committed
17 to this and making her chairmanship in
18 this department and this unit really
19 count. We can't do this without you. As
20 you've seen from the testimony here
21 today, you have people like Mike who
22 continuously challenge us, and they
23 should, and we should continue to
24 challenge ourselves and how do we make
25 this government more efficient. And

1

2 we're going to come up with a long-term
3 sustainable plan to keep those rec
4 centers clean, from something as simple
5 as a trash can and making sure that the
6 trash can gets changed and challenging
7 ourselves when folks will say, Well,
8 people are putting house trash there.
9 Well, we're going to have to work with
10 all of that. That's the reality of an
11 area that's extremely dense and you have
12 many multi-family units.

13 There's an answer to all of
14 this, and the challenge is always the
15 resources. I believe that we can do with
16 our resources -- we can have our
17 resources touch the ground in a more
18 efficient way, and that's our challenge
19 as a government to do and that's part of
20 my job here.

21 So thank all of the folks who
22 came. I know folks from Hunting Park
23 United and some of the other folks. For
24 me, this part of the job has been the one
25 that we're most focused. Jason Dawkins

1

2 in my office, that's all he does is focus
3 in on recreation centers, because I know
4 that I can't take care of all of the
5 issues in a district plagued with so much
6 poverty, but if I can make places safe
7 and I can give children options, whether
8 it's at schools or rec centers, I can do
9 that. I can't control the adults, but I
10 can control some of those, help reform
11 some of those institutions so they
12 respond. But we need you. We need you
13 to be on board, to continue to challenge
14 us and see the glass is half full.

15 So thank you.

16 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Thank you.

17 Councilman Oh.

18 COUNCILMAN OH: Thank you very
19 much. I just wanted to let you know,
20 because I see how frustrated you are,
21 that while you may not see everything
22 that we do, I actually visited that
23 library just a week ago and took a look
24 at the quality of the services inside the
25 library, and, of course, I couldn't avoid

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2 walking past the drug addicts and other
3 people. And I know that, as I had
4 mentioned earlier, I was there visiting
5 Buddy Osborne and Rock Ministries and the
6 wonderful work he does with the very
7 impossible population.

8

9 But it's a very challenging
10 area, has been. I remember that area
11 back in 1985 when I was in the DA's
12 office. And I know -- I'm aware of the
13 fact that there will be a new playground,
14 and Councilwoman will be there for the
15 dedication of the playground that is
being donated, I believe, by the Flyers.

16

MS. RENSCHAW: Flyers and KaBOOM
17 actually.

18

COUNCILMAN OH: Yes, KaBOOM.

19

MS. RENSCHAW: And we have a new
20 library friends group that was formed out
21 there of community residents. There are
22 positives.

23

COUNCILMAN OH: And I think
24 just, you know, from that aspect, the
25 first thing we think about is just how

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2 we -- so much space and the park benches,
3 it attracts all these problems at night,
4 where's the lighting, where's the
5 security. It become a habit. But just
6 from another angle, it's not just
7 residents of that neighborhood. That
8 neighborhood attracts drug addicts and
9 purchasers from all over the five-county
10 region, if not more, and a lot --

11 MS. RENSHAW: They're like lost
12 souls down there.

13 COUNCILMAN OH: A lot of lost
14 souls, a lot of kids who live in the
15 suburbs. And such a challenging problem,
16 but within just that one area itself, I
17 thought the exact same thing, a public
18 library, what a gem, kids can't come
19 here, you know.

20 What was suggested by actually
21 the businessman right across the street
22 at the stop and --

23 MS. RENSHAW: The 24 hour.

24 COUNCILWOMAN SANCHEZ: Sam.

25 COUNCILMAN OH: Sam. And he

1

2 said he'd talk to the Councilwoman, is,
3 Can't you make legislation just as you do
4 protecting the schools that this is a
5 safe zone for increased criminal
6 penalties at these libraries? And I
7 thought, Hey, that's a really wonderful
8 idea. It will come from the Legislature,
9 I believe. It's a criminal code from the
10 state Legislature, but certainly that's a
11 tool we can give to the police, and I
12 think there's other things that we're all
13 thinking about right now.

14 So thank you for your continued
15 and passionate efforts, all of you.

16 Now, I do apologize because I
17 keep bugging Councilwoman Sanchez. We
18 have an appointment with the Health
19 Department at 1 o'clock and that's why I
20 was kind of just letting the Chairwoman
21 know. I don't want to leave her here by
22 her lonesome or disrespect all of you who
23 have been waiting here, but we do have an
24 important issue with the Health
25 Department as well.

1

2

Thank you.

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MS. RENSHAW: Thank you very
much.

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6

MR. GANT: Thank you all very
much.

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COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Thank you
so much for coming.

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12

We have just two more people
left to testify, and that will be
Mr. Melvin Prince Johnakin and Mr. Eugene
Albert.

13

14

(Witnesses approached witness
table.)

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COUNCILWOMAN BASS: And so
Mr. Johnakin is the last, looks like, to
testify.

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Is there anybody else who
wanted to make any sort of commentary,
very brief? Allison, if you want to sign
up really quickly and we'll have you join
the panel.

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25

This will be our last panel.
We're going to ask you to be very, very
brief. So less than one minute, if you

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2 could, in your comments.

3

Do you have written testimony?

4

MS. HILLS: Yes, I do.

5

6 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: If you just
7 want to leave it there, we'll collect
8 that.

9

10 MR. JOHNAKIN: Madam Chair,
11 could I start while she's preparing or
12 should I wait?13 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: You can go
14 ahead and start. You want to state your
15 name for the record.16 MR. JOHNAKIN: Yes. Good
17 afternoon. My name is Melvin Prince
18 Johnakin. I live in the 4th District,
19 graduate of Cheney University, degrees in
20 recreation, leisure management, with a
21 minor in sociology. So I can speak
22 towards this issue.23 To me, it seems neglect, and I
24 think that the Recreation Department
25 bears much of the burden for these parks
 in the City of Philadelphia. I think
 they've been -- more so they've been

1

2 administering or managing people in the
3 community opposed to the dollars that
4 deals with these parks right here.

5

6 If you were to take a look at
7 the convoy of the rec administrators when
8 they come to a facility, it looks like
9 the President's convoy. You see the
10 SUVs. You see them follow each other.
11 You see just wasteful spending in that
12 area.

12

13 My major -- as much as I like
14 to wear suits, I wore a sweat suit every
15 day, because the interaction is just not
16 with the people coming to the facility,
17 it's the community as a whole.

17

18 You will not be able to
19 legislate this issue, nor will you be
20 able -- nor do I want to pay -- I'm both
21 a homeowner and I own several businesses.
22 So I pay a business privilege tax in the
23 City here. My tax dollars, I don't want
24 any of my tax dollars going for more cops
25 inside parks. I want the Recreation
Department to get out and meet with the

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2 people, meet with some of those Greek
3 fraternities and some of those sororities
4 and get them involved in helping the
5 whole community, because what happens is,
6 you open up a Pandora box where the
7 discretion is more of a criminal activity
8 going on there than a dispute. So a fist
9 fight is now -- under the Homeland
10 Security Act has gone into terroristic
11 threats and other things.

12 We have to not give up in this
13 City of Philadelphia on our ability to
14 communicate, regardless of what it looks
15 like right now. And all I've heard was
16 from them -- I haven't heard a plan that
17 says we're going to reinstitute some
18 training to our staff to deal with people
19 that may be let out of prisons or
20 released and may need to take a stroll in
21 the park to clear their head so they
22 don't go back. I haven't had a plan set
23 before me where they will train they
24 staff for people who are coming off of
25 drugs. I have a One Day At a Time

1

2 program. They need to utilize that park
3 to sit down. But if you don't have these
4 plans and your staff don't identify who
5 is who, they they're going to say that
6 that guy has been sitting on the bench,
7 and the cop is going to go over there and
8 say, Get up and leave, not knowing the
9 ramifications of what he had gone through
10 or what they had gone through.

11 So someone sat up here and said
12 there are more grandparents taking care
13 of these children today than the parents
14 are, but the parents are somewhere, and
15 if they're in these parks utilizing these
16 parks, no one right now could have -- no
17 one right now could determine if they're
18 utilizing the park because they need
19 their downsize or if they utilizing the
20 park because they're doing something they
21 shouldn't be doing. And that solely
22 rests on the people that we pay our tax
23 dollars to in this recreational program,
24 which is a non-profit -- a municipality
25 looking like a for-profit company.

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So, no, I don't want any more money going to the recreation program to put cops or extra security guards. What I want to see is some of the big people in this program get familiar with some of the little people that live in that neighborhood in them row houses -- maybe not the ones with porches; maybe the ones that just have steps -- and talk with these people so they can be on a first name basis.

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It's disturbing that you keep -- I got a 24-year-old and a four-year-old. We both use the parks, both in Philly and in Bala Cynwyd, you know. And so I go to the parks that they're familiar with.

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So I don't want an innocent child not being able to go to a park because that's in a bad neighborhood. I think 33rd and Diamond Street park is immaculate. If I had the resources and bought me a house over there, I will go over there every day. It has tennis. It

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2 has a golf course down the street. It
3 has a water park for the kids.

4

5 So you have to keep looking at
6 these jewels that you say that we have
7 and still working towards them, not
8 just -- it just disturbs me that we're
9 paying all of this money for
10 Commissioners of Recreation -- and I'm
11 not saying this one; I'm saying the job
12 itself -- to show up in these SUVs and
13 don't even know the people in the
14 community. It's like a photo op and then
15 they're going.

15

And I thank you for your time.

16

COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Thank you
17 for your comments.

18

19 And were you going to make a
20 comments? You said you have written
21 testimony, right?

21

22 MS. HILLS: Yes, but I would
23 also like to speak, if that's possible.
24 I have a few words after those worthy of
25 hearing.

25

COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Okay.

1

2 We're really going to ask you to be one
3 minute or less.

4 MS. HILLS: Okay. I will try
5 my best.

6 My name is Charlie Hills and I
7 serve the Grays Ferry, Point Breeze, West
8 Passyunk and Wilson Park communities as
9 Vice President of the Vare Advisory
10 Council. For those of you who are not
11 aware, Vare Advisory Council and Vare
12 Recreation Center is located in the South
13 Philadelphia area of 26th and Morris. As
14 Vice President, I've been heavily
15 involved in activities and the programs
16 that go on at the center and have
17 observed firsthand how important and
18 essential these recreation centers are to
19 our youth, our children and the young
20 adults.

21 I've come to realize that most
22 of the statements that have been made
23 today here are valid and that it takes
24 more than just parents these days to
25 raise our children. It's a lot of

1
2 involvement with the community,
3 individuals, and organizations such as
4 churches, schools, and recreation
5 centers, and it does take a village. I
6 believe someone else also mentioned that
7 earlier.

8 Today our youth utilize these
9 recreation centers, it's like a second
10 home, and to most, unfortunately, it is
11 home. And we've teamed up with the Parks
12 and Recreation Department and we've also
13 teamed up with the local police, and
14 we've tried our best, and we work hard
15 continuously to make sure that these are
16 safe havens that provide ongoing
17 academic, social, personal, and athletic
18 development. So it is important and
19 imperative that we continue to supply the
20 needs that we need in order to keep these
21 places safe havens.

22 I know that times are hard, and
23 we're aware of this, but it's not
24 acceptable that our children are the ones
25 that are suffering and reaping the

1

2 consequences and penalties from it.

3

4 I mean, today a lot of
5 children, as we've been aware, have been
6 dealing with a lot of anger, a lot of
7 hate, a lot of disappointments and
8 obstacles in their lives that some of us
9 can't even imagine. I mean, it goes
10 without saying that the recent incident
11 that occurred at the Southwest location
12 deeply saddens and disturbs us. And why?
13 It's because we're failing. We're
14 failing to meet our obligation. We are
15 failing to be the safe haven that our
16 children so desperately need. And why?
17 Because of budget cuts. Budget cuts
18 equal consequences.

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 This whole strategy with do
more with less has proven to be nonsense.
It doesn't take rocket scientists to
understand and know that the only thing
you can do with less and that can be done
with less is less.

 Currently, the Department of
Recreation, Parks and Recreation, is at

1

2 the bottom of the barrel. We're
3 literally scraping. We can barely make
4 our basic needs to be met. And I'm
5 referencing field lights, like we
6 mentioned earlier, heating, plumbing
7 repairs and, most importantly, staffing,
8 which is the key. The department is now
9 at the lowest staffing level since the
10 Goode Administration. As we speak, we
11 only have 18 recreation leaders, 35
12 assistant recreation leaders, and have an
13 extreme difficulty supplying recreation
14 specialty instructors.

15 It's time for us to wake up and
16 really understand what's going on. These
17 budget cuts have resulted in less staff.
18 Less staff means less ears and eyes that
19 are able to supervise and able to
20 monitor. Less supervision means fewer
21 programs and also activities. Less staff
22 also means our facilities are kept in
23 potential state of need. And we all have
24 heard an idle mind is a devil's workshop.

25 If we do not continue to

1

2 reverse and practice reversing the trend,
3 there will be fewer programs and
4 activities and an increase in the type of
5 incidents that have brought us here today
6 for this testimony.

7

8 If we do not draw our children
9 off of the streets and into properly
10 maintained and staffed facilities, then
11 we are defeating the purpose and the
12 potential that these recreation centers
present.

13

COUNCILWOMAN BASS: I don't
14 want to cut you off, but I have to.

15

MS. HILLS: I understand. But
16 let me just sum up. Vare Recreation has
17 been mentioned a couple of times. We
18 actually have raised, the Vare Advisory
19 Council, has raised and purchased a
20 \$16,000 video surveillance system. It
21 has 16 cameras and monitors, both outdoor
22 activity, which is the swimming pools and
23 the basketball court areas, in addition
24 to indoor, which is the entranceways,
25 exits, stairways, and all rooms that

1

2 conduct activity. We've mentioned
3 several before and several times that the
4 focus needs to be better equipping our
5 recreation centers with proper staff and
6 maintenance and video surveillance
7 systems.

8

COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Okay.

9

Thank you very much. Thank you. And you
10 have copies of your full testimony.

11

MS. HILLS: Yes.

12

COUNCILWOMAN BASS: We'll add
13 the full testimony to the record.

14

MS. HILLS: All right.

15

COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Thank you.

16

And last, but certainly not
17 least, Allison Weiss.

18

MS. WEISS: Allison Weiss.

19

COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Allison,
20 you have to speak into the microphone.

21

MS. WEISS: And you have my
22 written testimony, so I'll just read my
23 last sentence.

24

Please let us restore and staff
25 recreation centers and parks so they are

1

2 places of pride and safe havens, not
3 blight and death in our communities. If
4 it can be done to the Benjamin Franklin
5 Parkway, it can be done in our
6 neighborhoods.

7

COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Very good.

8

Thank you, Allison.

9

I want to thank everyone for
10 being here today. I do apologize that we
11 have to cut it a little bit short.

12 Actually, we're actually over time, but
13 we are going to have to cut time because
14 there is another hearing that's going to
15 be taking place. And at this time, we're
16 going to recess this matter until the
17 call of the Chair.

18

Thank you for being here,
19 everyone.

20

(Committee on Parks, Recreation
21 and Cultural Affairs recessed at 1:15
22 p.m.)

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CERTIFICATE

I HEREBY CERTIFY that the
proceedings, evidence and objections are
contained fully and accurately in the
stenographic notes taken by me upon the
foregoing matter on August 16, 2012, and that
this is a true and correct transcript of same.

MICHELE L. MURPHY
RPR-Notary Public

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