

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

Room 400, City Hall
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Monday, December 1, 2014
4:00 p.m.

PRESENT:

COUNCILWOMAN CINDY BASS, CHAIR
COUNCILWOMAN JANNIE L. BLACKWELL
COUNCILMAN BOBBY HENON
COUNCILMAN CURTIS JONES, JR.
COUNCILMAN DAVID OH
COUNCILWOMAN MARIA D. QUINONES-SANCHEZ

BILLS 140853, 140854, and 140948

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1
2 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Good
3 afternoon. This hearing is called to
4 order. This is a public hearing of the
5 City Council Committee on Parks,
6 Recreation and Cultural Affairs. The
7 purpose of this public hearing is to hear
8 testimony on Bills No. 140853, 140854,
9 and 140948.

10 I want to recognize the
11 presence of a quorum of Committee
12 members. Members of the Committee in
13 attendance are Councilwoman Maria
14 Quinones-Sanchez, Majority Leader Curtis
15 Jones Jr., and Councilman David Oh. Also
16 joining us is Councilwoman Jannie
17 Blackwell.

18 And are there any opening
19 remarks?

20 (No response.)

21 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Then we
22 will now have the Clerk read the title of
23 Bill No. 140853.

24 THE CLERK: Bill No. 140853,
25 entitled "An ordinance authorizing the

1 12/1/14 - PARKS - BILL 140853, etc.
2 Commissioner of Public Property, on
3 behalf of the City of Philadelphia, to
4 lease from the Philadelphia Housing
5 Authority a parcel of land bounded by a
6 portion of Brown Street, a portion of
7 47th Street, Aspen Street and Markoe
8 Street, along with the improvements
9 thereon, to be known upon the completion
10 of the construction as the Lucien E.
11 Blackwell Community Center, all under
12 certain terms and conditions."

13 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: And we're
14 going to have our first panel come
15 forward. That will be Rebecca Rhynhart,
16 Budget Director; Michael DiBerardinis,
17 Deputy Mayor; and Michael Johns,
18 Philadelphia Housing Authority.

19 (Witnesses approached witness
20 table.)

21 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: And also
22 joining us, for the record, is Councilman
23 Bobby Henon.

24 And if you would state your
25 name for the record and proceed with your

1 12/1/14 - PARKS - BILL 140853, etc.
2 testimony.

3 MS. RHYNHART: Good afternoon,
4 Councilwoman Bass and members of the
5 Parks, Recreation and Cultural Affairs
6 Committee. My name is Rebecca Rhynhart
7 and I'm the Budget Director for the City.
8 I'm here to testify on behalf of Bill No.
9 140853. With me is Michael DiBerardinis,
10 Deputy Mayor for Environmental and
11 Community Resources, as well as Michael
12 Johns representing the Philadelphia
13 Housing Authority.

14 Bill No. 140853 will authorize
15 the City to enter into a 99-year term
16 lease agreement to lease from the PHA a
17 parcel of land, along with improvements
18 made on this land, to create the Lucien
19 Blackwell Community Center. The parcel
20 of land is bounded by a portion of Brown
21 Street, a portion of 47th Street, Aspen
22 Street and Markoe Street.

23 The new Lucien Blackwell
24 Community Center will have a gymnasium
25 with courts, bleachers, a commercial

1 12/1/14 - PARKS - BILL 140853, etc.
2 kitchen, and a community room for
3 activities and programming. The cost of
4 this project is estimated at \$5 million,
5 of which the City's contribution is
6 2,050,000, and the PHA is responsible for
7 the remaining costs of the project.

8 Certain documents will be
9 executed as part of the lease agreement
10 structure, including a Ground Lease
11 between the City and PHA, a Grant
12 Agreement between PAID and the City, and
13 the Sub-grant Agreement between PAID and
14 the PHA. The grant and sub-grant
15 structure is necessary with PAID in order
16 to transfer the City funding.

17 I respectfully request that you
18 report Bill No. 140853 out of Committee
19 with a favorable recommendation, and I
20 further request that the rules of Council
21 be suspended so as to permit first
22 reading at the next session of Council.

23 This concludes my testimony,
24 and we are happy to answer any questions
25 you may have.

1 12/1/14 - PARKS - BILL 140853, etc.

2 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Thank you
3 for your testimony. And we'll save the
4 questions for the last.

5 Councilwoman, you want to wait
6 or you want to make --

7 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: I just
8 want to say thank you to them. Without
9 the input from those three important and
10 vital participants -- we've been at this
11 since around '01. That's right,
12 Councilman Jones. Were it not for them,
13 we would not be here. I'm so grateful.
14 It's my early Christmas present. It
15 means everything, and thank you, thank
16 you, thank you to each of you for
17 bringing us to this point. Thank you.

18 Thank you, Madam President. I
19 hope that the Chair and the Committee
20 will report this out with a suspension of
21 the rules. Thank you.

22 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Thank you,
23 Councilwoman.

24 Deputy Mayor, do you want to
25 proceed?

1 12/1/14 - PARKS - BILL 140853, etc.

2 DEPUTY MAYOR DiBERARDINIS:

3 Beyond Rebecca's testimony, I would like
4 to add that we're very excited about this
5 process and the idea of having, in a few
6 short years, having a wonderful gymnasium
7 and multi-purpose facility in the area,
8 and we also -- if you look at the three
9 or four blocks there, we're developing a
10 park there, working with the Water
11 Department. So we have a sort of an
12 outdoor green space. And with the help
13 of the Councilwoman, we just completed
14 significant improvements to the
15 playground that is adjacent to the future
16 Lucien Blackwell Community Center. So we
17 will have quite a complex out there and
18 one that can serve broad sectors of the
19 community with multiple activities and
20 programs. So to us, it's putting another
21 asset and resource into the Department,
22 adding on to the park and to the
23 playground, and helping us meet our
24 mission.

25 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Very good.

1 12/1/14 - PARKS - BILL 140853, etc.

2 Thank you for your comments, for your
3 testimony.

4 And Mr. Johns.

5 MR. JOHNS: Yes. I just want
6 to add that this particular project is a
7 long time coming. I happen to have
8 worked on the Lucien E. Blackwell Mill
9 Creek Hope VI project back in 1999. This
10 was a commitment that the Councilwoman
11 made and the Housing Authority made to
12 that community, to build a community
13 center, to work with the City to build a
14 park. And although it's taken a decade
15 or so to get to this point, we never
16 stopped --

17 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: We'll
18 take it.

19 MR. JOHNS: -- we never stopped
20 our commitment to the Councilwoman's
21 district and we never had -- we had
22 unwavering support of the City throughout
23 the process. It's taken us a long time,
24 but I'm so proud and the Housing
25 Authority is proud to be a part of this

1 12/1/14 - PARKS - BILL 140853, etc.
2 process and to see finally this community
3 center get built.

4 Thank you.

5 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Councilman.

6 COUNCILMAN JONES: I just want
7 to say that one thing you got to know is
8 that when you promise Councilwoman Jannie
9 Blackwell something, she's not going to
10 forget. So you can drag your feet all
11 you want, she will remember. God bless.

12 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
13 you.

14 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: I think the
15 Commissioner may have left and come back
16 during the time. It's still on the
17 table, but we're getting it done.

18 So thank you so much.

19 Are there any questions from
20 the panel, any questions?

21 (No response.)

22 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Thank you
23 very much for your testimony.

24 Is there anyone else here to
25 testify on this bill?

1 12/1/14 - PARKS - BILL 140853, etc.

2 MR. ALI: Yeah. I'd like to.

3 (Witness approached witness
4 table.)

5 MR. ALI: Good afternoon --

6 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Good
7 afternoon. Please state your name for
8 the record.

9 MR. ALI: -- Chairwoman and
10 members of the Committee. My name is
11 Jihad Ali. I'm here to testify on behalf
12 of the Lucien E. Blackwell Community
13 Center.

14 You know, it's an honor to be
15 here just to say what I'm about to say,
16 because Lucien E. Blackwell, he's a great
17 man. He's a great man regardless of what
18 his race was, but the fact that he was an
19 African American, he was an inspiration
20 to me, because he came through a period
21 of time when we had the hot '60s and he
22 rumbled right here on this floor to get
23 the rights of the people in our
24 communities respected. So it's an honor
25 to see that we're going to have a

1 12/1/14 - PARKS - BILL 140853, etc.
2 facility that we can put up in his name.

3 One thing I would like to ask
4 the Councilwoman to consider is that if
5 there is some money that you can extract
6 from Parks and Recreation, that we
7 produce a video and show it so the young
8 people can know what kind of man he was
9 and how he came through all this stuff.
10 So just something if there's some money
11 left over from the budget that you can do
12 that with. But I think he was a great
13 man. It's a great honor to be here to
14 speak to the record.

15 Thank you.

16 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Thank you
17 for your testimony.

18 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
19 you.

20 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Is there
21 anyone else here to testify on this bill?

22 (No response.)

23 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Can we have
24 the Clerk now read the title of Bill No.
25 140854.

12/1/14 - PARKS - BILL 140853, etc.

THE CLERK: Bill No. 140854,
entitled "An ordinance authorizing the
Public Property Commissioner, on behalf
of the City of Philadelphia, to accept
from The School District of Philadelphia
title to certain parcels of land located
within an area bounded by Media Street to
the North, North 52nd Street to the East,
Master Street to the South, and North
Peach Street to the West, all under
certain terms and conditions."

COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Testifying
on Bill No. 140854 is Michael
DiBerardinis, Deputy Mayor.

(Witness approached witness
table.)

DEPUTY MAYOR DiBERARDINIS:
Good afternoon again, Chairwoman Bass and
Committee members. My name is Michael
DiBerardinis, Deputy Mayor and
Commissioner of Parks and Recreation. I
am pleased to appear before you today on
behalf of the Department to testify in
support of Bill 140854, which authorizes

1 12/1/14 - PARKS - BILL 140853, etc.
2 the Public Property Commissioner, on
3 behalf of the City of Philadelphia, to
4 accept from The School District of
5 Philadelphia title to certain parcels of
6 land known as the Conestoga Recreation
7 Center/Playground located at Media Street
8 to the North, North 52nd Street to the
9 East, Master Street to the South, and
10 North Peach Street to the West.
11 Philadelphia Parks and Recreation has
12 been maintaining and programming at this
13 site, and we would appreciate the
14 opportunity to have this site transferred
15 to us.

16 Just a quick -- we're doing a
17 special project here, part of Green 2015.
18 We discovered during the process that the
19 land we've been caring for, playground
20 built on it, was School District
21 property. So in order to complete the
22 renovations -- we already raised the
23 money, so the money is in the till -- we
24 need to transfer the land to the City,
25 and then we'll be able to complete the

1 12/1/14 - PARKS - BILL 140853, etc.

2 project. Essentially that's the deal.

3 So, therefore, I appear before
4 you to pledge support of the Department
5 for this legislation and respectfully
6 request that City Council approve the
7 Bill 140854.

8 In addition, I respectfully
9 request the Committee vote the bill out
10 of Committee with a favorable
11 recommendation and that the rules be
12 suspended to permit first reading at the
13 next Council session.

14 Thank you.

15 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Thank you
16 for your testimony.

17 Any questions from the panel?

18 Councilwoman Blackwell.

19 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
20 you, Madam Chair and Committee. This is
21 a long time coming. This is in my
22 district as well. And anybody who is
23 around it knows about the school and the
24 activities there right across the street,
25 and it would just be a perfect conclusion

1 12/1/14 - PARKS - BILL 140853, etc.
2 to these actions, and we thank the
3 Recreation Department and certainly ask
4 your consideration.

5 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Thank you,
6 Councilwoman.

7 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
8 you.

9 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Is there
10 anyone else here to testify on this bill?

11 (No response.)

12 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: And if not,
13 then can we please have the Clerk read
14 the title of Bill No. 140948.

15 THE CLERK: Bill No. 140948,
16 entitled "An ordinance authorizing the
17 Commissioner of Public Property, on
18 behalf of the City of Philadelphia, to
19 accept one or more deeds to parcels of
20 land, located at 1114-1 Locust Street,
21 1127-31 Waverly Street, 831-839 South
22 Street; amending Chapter 15-200 of The
23 Philadelphia Code, entitled 'Fairmount
24 Park,' to include the gardens under the
25 jurisdiction of the Department of Parks

1 12/1/14 - PARKS - BILL 140853, etc.
2 and Recreation; and authorizing the
3 Commissioner of the Department of Parks
4 and Recreation to enter into an agreement
5 to lease out such property."

6 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: And we're
7 going to have come forward our
8 Commissioner DiBerardinis and also Rick
9 Spitzborg of the Washington Square West
10 Civic Association.

11 (Witnesses approached witness
12 table.)

13 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Good
14 afternoon.

15 DEPUTY MAYOR DiBERARDINIS:
16 Good afternoon again to everyone.
17 Chairwoman Bass, Committee members, my
18 name is Michael DiBerardinis, Deputy
19 Mayor, Commissioner of Parks and
20 Recreation. I am pleased to appear
21 before you today, on behalf of the
22 Department, to testify in support of Bill
23 140948, which authorizes the Public
24 Property Commissioner, on behalf of the
25 City of Philadelphia, to accept one or

1 12/1/14 - PARKS - BILL 140853, etc.
2 more deeds to parcels on land located at
3 1114-18 Locust Street, 1127-31 Waverly
4 Street, and 831-839 South Street to
5 include the gardens under the
6 jurisdiction of the Department of Parks
7 and Recreation.

8 Just to, again, do a quick
9 summary here. These gardens have been in
10 place, two for 19 years and another for
11 39 years. This would give them sort of
12 protection and the kind of business
13 certainty one needs to continue to put
14 all the volunteer time and to sort of
15 build the values that these gardens
16 provide to the neighbors, not only of the
17 neighborhood but residents around the
18 City.

19 We are happy to accept these
20 properties into our inventory and to
21 begin to build a system of supports for
22 gardens all over the City and to work
23 with Council in some of these transfers
24 with RDA that are necessary.

25 So with that in mind, I,

1 12/1/14 - PARKS - BILL 140853, etc.
2 therefore, appear before you to pledge
3 support of the Department of Parks and
4 Recreation for this legislation and
5 respectfully ask City Council to approve
6 Bill 140948.

7 In addition, I respectfully
8 request that this Committee vote this
9 bill out of Committee with a favorable
10 recommendation and that the rules be
11 suspended to permit first reading at the
12 next Council session.

13 Thank you.

14 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Thank you
15 for your testimony.

16 Sir, can you please state your
17 name for the record and begin your
18 testimony.

19 MR. SPITZBORG: Good afternoon,
20 Madam Chair and members of the Committee
21 on Parks, Recreation and Cultural
22 Affairs. Thank you for the opportunity
23 to testify before you in support of Bill
24 140948. My name is Rick Spitzborg and I
25 am here representing the Washington

1 12/1/14 - PARKS - BILL 140853, etc.

2 Square West Civic Association.

3 The three properties identified
4 in the bill and proposed for transfer to
5 the Department of Parks and Recreation
6 are all located in Washington Square
7 West. All of these properties are
8 community gardens that have been part of
9 the neighborhood fabric for decades and
10 have been administered by the Civic
11 Association as lessee since the late
12 1990's.

13 Wash West has had a long and
14 very positive relationship with Council
15 as it pertains to the gardens. Going way
16 back to 1976, then Councilman Jimmy
17 Tayoun put his foot to a shovel in a
18 derelict lot on Locust Street and put his
19 hand to pen and paper in this building to
20 establish our first community garden. In
21 the early 1990's, then Councilman Frank
22 DiCicco helped to have years of debris
23 and rubble removed from a vacant lot on
24 South Street to establish another
25 community garden. And fast forward to

1 12/1/14 - PARKS - BILL 140853, etc.
2 the year 2014, we so very much appreciate
3 Councilman Mark Squilla's support and
4 advocacy on behalf of all of the
5 community gardens in Wash West.

6 The passage of this ordinance
7 will culminate a 40-year partnership
8 between City Council and Washington
9 Square West, and we thank you for your
10 continuing commitment to our gardens.

11 The Civic Association runs a
12 lot of programs, but none is more popular
13 than our community gardening program.
14 Together, the three gardens provide 82
15 lots in which more than 120 neighbors
16 enjoy gardening. Families garden
17 together. Friends and housemates garden
18 together. And yet equally important, the
19 close to 15,000 residents who live in
20 Washington Square West enjoy three
21 beautiful, green open spaces in an
22 otherwise densely developed urban
23 neighborhood.

24 I certainly want to acknowledge
25 the Redevelopment Authority for the many

1 12/1/14 - PARKS - BILL 140853, etc.
2 years they have generously leased the
3 properties to us and a particular thank
4 you to Christie Williams Jackson for her
5 direction on support. But I think we're
6 all aware of the challenges when the
7 forces of preservation and development
8 come face to face.

9 So we welcome the opportunity
10 to expand our collaboration with
11 Philadelphia Parks and Recreation. We
12 are already working together in Kahn
13 Park, in Seger Playground and as partners
14 in planting street trees. Moving these
15 parcels into the property inventory of
16 the Department of Parks and Recreation
17 will ensure that the quality of life is
18 preserved in our vibrant neighborhood and
19 protect the public access to open spaces.

20 We support this bill and urge
21 Council to enact it into law.

22 Thank you very much for the
23 opportunity to testify before you today.

24 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Thank you
25 for your testimony.

1 12/1/14 - PARKS - BILL 140853, etc.

2 Any questions from the panel?

3 (No response.)

4 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: And is

5 there anyone else here to testify on

6 behalf of Bill No. 140948?

7 (No response.)

8 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: And if not,

9 that concludes testimony on this bill,

10 and we'll now go into a public hearing on

11 Bills No. 140853, 140854, and 140948.

12 I want to recognize

13 Councilmember Jones for a motion on Bill

14 No. 140853.

15 COUNCILMAN JONES: Thank you,

16 Madam Chair. I make a motion on Bill No.

17 140853. I move that the rules of Council

18 be suspended and offer this bill with a

19 favorable recommendation so it can be

20 read at our next session of Council.

21 (Duly seconded.)

22 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: It's been

23 moved and properly seconded that Bill No.

24 140853 be reported from this Committee

25 with a favorable recommendation and

1 12/1/14 - PARKS - BILL 140853, etc.
2 further moved that the rules of Council
3 be suspended to permit first reading of
4 this bill at the next session of Council.

5 All those in favor of the
6 motion will signify by saying aye.

7 (Aye.)

8 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Any
9 opposed?

10 (No response.)

11 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: The ayes
12 have it and the motion carries. Bill No.
13 140853 will be reported from this
14 Committee with a favorable recommendation
15 with a request that the rules of Council
16 be suspended to permit first reading at
17 the next session of Council.

18 I want to recognize
19 Councilmember Jones for a motion on Bill
20 No. 140854.

21 COUNCILMAN JONES: Thank you
22 again, Madam Chair. I move that Bill No.
23 140854 be moved from this Committee with
24 a favorable recommendation and that the
25 rules of Council be suspended to allow

1 12/1/14 - PARKS - BILL 140853, etc.
2 for the first reading at our next session
3 of Council.

4 (Duly seconded.)

5 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: It has been
6 moved and properly seconded that Bill No.
7 140854 be reported from this Committee
8 with a favorable recommendation and
9 further moved that the rules of Council
10 be suspended to permit first reading of
11 this bill at the next session of Council.

12 All those in favor of this
13 motion please signify by saying aye.

14 (Aye.)

15 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Those
16 opposed?

17 (No response.)

18 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: The ayes
19 have it and the motion carries. Bill No.
20 140854 will be reported from this
21 Committee with a favorable recommendation
22 with a request that the rules of Council
23 be suspended to permit first reading at
24 the next session of Council.

25 And I also want to recognize

1 12/1/14 - PARKS - BILL 140853, etc.

2 Councilmember Jones for a motion on Bill
3 No. 140948.

4 COUNCILMAN JONES: Again, thank
5 you, Madam Chair. I move that Bill No.
6 140948 be moved from this Committee with
7 a favorable recommendation. I further
8 move that the rules of Council be
9 suspended to allow first reading of this
10 bill at our next scheduled session of
11 Council.

12 (Duly seconded.)

13 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: It's been
14 moved and properly seconded that Bill No.
15 140948 be reported from this Committee
16 with a favorable recommendation and
17 further moved that the rules of Council
18 be suspended to permit first reading of
19 this bill at the next session of Council.

20 All those in favor of the
21 motion will signify by saying aye.

22 (Aye.)

23 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Anyone
24 opposed?

25 (No response.)

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COUNCILWOMAN BASS: The ayes
have it and the motion carries. Bill No.
140948 will be reported from this
Committee with a favorable recommendation
with a request that the rules of Council
be suspended to permit first reading at
the next session of Council.

This concludes the public
meeting on the bills. There will be no
further business before this Committee on
Parks, Recreation and Cultural Affairs.

Thank you very much.

(Committee on Parks, Recreation
and Cultural Affairs concluded at 4:20
p.m.)

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CERTIFICATE

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

MICHELE L. MURPHY
RPR-Notary Public

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