

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

Room 400, City Hall
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Wednesday, September 30, 2015
9:35 a.m.

PRESENT:

COUNCILWOMAN CINDY BASS, CHAIR
COUNCILMAN BOBBY HENON
COUNCILMAN CURTIS JONES, JR.
COUNCILMAN DAVID OH
COUNCILWOMAN BLONDELL REYNOLDS BROWN

BILL 150475 - An ordinance authorizing the
Public Property Commissioner, on behalf of the
City, to accept title from Natural Lands
Trust, Inc., to a certain approximately 6 acre
parcel of land known as 7900 Cherokee Street
or Lane...

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2 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Good
3 morning. This meeting is called to
4 order. This is the 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 Bill No. 150475.

9 I want to recognize the
10 presence of a quorum of Committee
11 members. Members of the Committee in
12 attendance are Councilwoman Blondell
13 Reynolds Brown, Councilman Bobby Henon,
14 and Councilman David Oh.

15 And before we begin the opening
16 testimony, does anyone on the Committee
17 have any opening remarks?

18 (No response.)

19 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: And will
20 the Clerk now read the title of Bill No.
21 150475.

22 THE CLERK: An ordinance
23 authorizing the Public Property
24 Commissioner, on behalf of the City, to
25 accept from the Natural Lands Trust,

1 9/30/15 - PARKS - BILL 150475
2 Inc., to a certain approximately 6 acre
3 parcel of land known as 7900 Cherokee
4 Street or Lane, subject to a conservation
5 easement granted by the Natural Land
6 Trust, Inc., to Wissahickon Valley
7 Watershed Association, and incorporating
8 the parcel into Wissahickon Valley Park,
9 all under certain terms and conditions.

10 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Thank you.
11 And can we have the first witness come
12 forward to testify, if the Clerk can call
13 the first witness to testify.

14 THE CLERK: Mark Focht.
15 (Witness approached witness
16 table.)

17 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Good
18 morning. We're a little informal this
19 morning, Mark. How are you?

20 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FOCHT: I
21 noticed. That's fine.

22 Good morning, Chairwoman Bass
23 and members of the Committee on Parks,
24 Recreation and Cultural Affairs. I'm
25 Mark Focht, First Deputy Commissioner of

1 9/30/15 - PARKS - BILL 150475

2 Philadelphia Parks and Recreation, and I
3 am here to testify in favor of Bill No.
4 150475, authorizing the Public Property
5 Commissioner, on behalf of the City, to
6 accept title from the Natural Lands
7 Trust, Inc., to a certain approximately 6
8 acre parcel of land known as 7900
9 Cherokee Street, subject to a
10 conservation easement granted by Natural
11 Lands Trust, Inc., to the Wissahickon
12 Valley Watershed Association, and
13 incorporating the parcel into Wissahickon
14 Valley Park, under all certain terms and
15 conditions.

16 Philadelphia Parks and
17 Recreation has been honored to serve as
18 the municipal stewards and caretakers of
19 Wissahickon Valley Park since its
20 inception in the 1880s. The Wissahickon
21 is a unique urban natural environment,
22 earning the designation of a National
23 Natural Area by the National Park
24 Service.

25 7900 Cherokee Street is a

1 9/30/15 - PARKS - BILL 150475

2 sloped, wooded parcel immediately
3 contiguous with Wissahickon Valley Park
4 along Valley Green Road. Most people who
5 pass the site today would assume the
6 parcel is already part of the park
7 system.

8 Parks and Recreation has worked
9 for years with both the Natural Lands
10 Trust and the Wissahickon Valley
11 Watershed Association on important
12 environmental and land conservation
13 issues throughout the City and region.
14 We are pleased to accept, on behalf of
15 the City, ownership of this parcel from
16 NLT and commit to preserving it in its
17 natural state, consistent with the
18 conservation easement held by the
19 Wissahickon Valley Watershed Association.

20 I ask, therefore, respectfully
21 that you move Bill No. 150475 out of
22 Committee with a favorable recommendation
23 and ask that the rules of Council be
24 suspended to permit first reading at the
25 next meeting of Council.

1 9/30/15 - PARKS - BILL 150475

2 I'm happy to answer any
3 questions you may have.

4 Thank you.

5 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Thank you,
6 Mark, for your testimony.

7 Are there any questions or
8 comments from members of the Committee?

9 Yes. Councilwoman Blondell
10 Reynolds Brown.

11 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: Good
12 morning. Share with us briefly what
13 prompted this next major step.

14 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FOCHT: The
15 Natural Lands Trust, who currently owns
16 the land, and the Wissahickon Valley
17 Watershed Association that owns the
18 conservation easement on the land reached
19 out to us about a little over a year ago.
20 They regularly check in with us when
21 their land is contiguous with land
22 already under the jurisdiction of Parks
23 and Recreation for ecological management
24 purposes, and Natural Lands Trust was
25 reevaluating their portfolio, and in

1 9/30/15 - PARKS - BILL 150475

2 their portfolio this is a relatively
3 small parcel at only 6 acres and since it
4 is contiguous to the Wissahickon -- and,
5 as I say, if anyone drives by it today,
6 everyone thinks it's part of the park
7 already -- they approached us with the
8 willingness to donate it to the City.
9 They were aware of the Mayor's program to
10 add 500 acres of parkland and thought
11 here's a parcel that may help that
12 initiative, and indeed it does.

13 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: Okay.

14 Thank you.

15 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FOCHT:

16 Thank you.

17 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Thank you.

18 So this is more really just a bit of a
19 formality in terms of making this legally
20 a part of the parkland?

21 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FOCHT:

22 Correct. Yes.

23 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Very good.

24 All right. Thank you very much.

25 Any other questions?

1 9/30/15 - PARKS - BILL 150475

2 (No response.)

3 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: And can the
4 Clerk please call forward the next
5 witness to testify.

6 THE CLERK: H. Scott Wendle,
7 Vice President, Natural Lands Trust.

8 (Witness approached witness
9 table.)

10 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Good
11 morning.

12 MR. WENDLE: Good morning. How
13 are you?

14 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Please
15 state your name for the record and begin
16 your testimony.

17 MR. WENDLE: Thank you for the
18 opportunity.

19 Good afternoon, Chairwoman Bass
20 and members of the Committee of Parks,
21 Recreation and Cultural Affairs. My name
22 is Scott Wendle and I serve as Vice
23 President for Natural Lands Trust. I am
24 here to testify in favor of Bill 150475,
25 authorizing the Public Property

1 9/30/15 - PARKS - BILL 150475

2 Commissioner, on behalf of the City, to
3 accept title from the Trust, a non-profit
4 conservancy, to an approximately 6 acre
5 parcel of land we call the Dodge Tract
6 located at 7900 Cherokee Street. We
7 understand that the Parks and Recreation
8 Department, for which we have high
9 regard, will be responsible for its
10 maintenance upon acceptance.

11 Natural Lands Trust purchased a
12 9.5 acre property in 1985 in order to
13 protect the majority of its woodland.
14 This 6.2 acre tract is the portion in a
15 time prior to current Commonwealth open
16 space grants that we were able to save
17 after covering the costs of acquisition
18 with a three-lot subdivision. We
19 subsequently gave a conservation easement
20 to the Wissahickon Valley Watershed
21 Association in order to ensure that it
22 would remain open space permanently.

23 We would be very pleased to
24 know that the effort we began in 1985
25 might be carried on by the City of

1 9/30/15 - PARKS - BILL 150475

2 Philadelphia. Therefore, I request that
3 you move Bill 150475 out of Committee
4 with a favorable recommendation.

5 I'm happy to answer any
6 questions you might have.

7 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Thank you
8 very much. I just have one brief
9 question. Originally it was purchased as
10 a 9 and a half acre property and it says
11 in your testimony that 6.2 acres are
12 being transferred. What happened with
13 the difference?

14 MR. WENDLE: The other three
15 was subdivided off and sold as private
16 residences, and we used the funding that
17 was generated by that sale to pay for the
18 purchase of the bulk.

19 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Okay.
20 Thank you very much.

21 MR. WENDLE: Thank you.

22 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Any
23 additional questions from the Committee?

24 (No response.)

25 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: All right.

1 9/30/15 - PARKS - BILL 150475

2 Is there anyone else here who would like
3 to testify regarding this bill?

4 (No response.)

5 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: And if not,
6 that concludes the public hearing on Bill
7 No. 150475. We'll now go into a public
8 meeting to consider the action to be
9 taken on the bill.

10 COUNCILMAN HENON: Thank you,
11 Madam Chair. I ask that Bill No. 150475
12 be moved out of Committee with a
13 favorable recommendation and ask that the
14 rules of Council be suspended as to be
15 permitted to be read at our next Council
16 session.

17 (Duly seconded.)

18 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: It's been
19 moved and properly seconded that Bill No.
20 150475 be reported from this Committee
21 with a favorable recommendation and
22 further moved that the rules of Council
23 be suspended to permit first reading of
24 this bill at the next session of Council.

25 All of those in favor will

1 9/30/15 - PARKS - BILL 150475

2 motion by signifying aye.

3 (Aye.)

4 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Those

5 opposed?

6 (No response.)

7 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: All right.

8 And before we dismiss, I do want to

9 acknowledge the presence of Councilman

10 Curtis Jones, Jr.

11 The ayes have it and the motion

12 carries. Bill No. 150475 will be

13 reported from this Committee with a

14 favorable recommendation with a request

15 that the rules of Council be suspended to

16 permit first reading at the next session

17 of Council.

18 And with that, the business of

19 this Committee is concluded. Thank you

20 very much.

21 (Committee on Parks, Recreation

22 and Cultural Affairs concluded at 9:40

23 a.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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Committee on Parks, Recreation and Cultural Affairs
September 30, 2015

Page 1

A a.m 1:8 12:23 able 9:16 accept 1:16 2:25 4:6 5:14 9:3 acceptance 9:10 accurately 13:5 acknowledge 12:9 acquisition 9:17 acre 1:16 3:2 4:8 9:4,12 9:14 10:10 acres 7:3,10 10:11 action 11:8 add 7:10 additional 10:23 Affairs 1:4 2:6 3:24 8:21 12:22 afternoon 8:19 ago 6:19 and/or 13:23 answer 6:2 10:5 apply 13:21 approached 3:15 7:7 8:8 approximat... 1:16 3:2 4:7 9:4 Area 4:23 Association 3:7 4:12 5:11,19 6:17 9:21 assume 5:5 attendance 2:12 authorizing 1:15 2:23 4:4 8:25 aware 7:9 aye 12:2,3 ayes 12:11	B Bass 1:11 2:2 2:19 3:10 3:17,22 6:5 7:17,23 8:3 8:10,14,19 10:7,19,22 10:25 11:5 11:18 12:4 12:7 began 9:24 behalf 1:15 2:24 4:5 5:14 9:2 bill 1:15 2:8 2:20 3:1 4:1 4:3 5:1,21 6:1 7:1 8:1 8:24 9:1 10:1,3 11:1 11:3,6,9,11 11:19,24 12:1,12 bit 7:18 Blondell 1:13 2:12 6:9 Bobby 1:11 2:13 brief 10:8 briefly 6:12 Brown 1:13 2:13 6:10 6:11 7:13 bulk 10:18 business 12:18 C call 3:12 8:4 9:5 called 2:3 caretakers 4:18 carried 9:25 carries 12:12 certain 1:16 3:2,9 4:7,14 CERTIFIC... 13:2 certification 13:20 CERTIFY 13:3	certifying 13:24 Chair 1:11 11:11 Chairwoman 3:22 8:19 check 6:20 Cherokee 1:17 3:3 4:9 4:25 9:6 CINDY 1:11 City 1:2,7,16 2:5,24 4:5 5:13,15 7:8 9:2,25 Clerk 2:20,22 3:12,14 8:4 8:6 come 3:11 comments 6:8 Commissio... 1:15 2:24 3:20,25 4:5 6:14 7:15 7:21 9:2 commit 5:16 Committee 1:3 2:5,10 2:11,16 3:23 5:22 6:8 8:20 10:3,23 11:12,20 12:13,19,21 Commonwe... 9:15 concluded 12:19,22 concludes 11:6 conditions 3:9 4:15 conservancy 9:4 conservation 3:4 4:10 5:12,18 6:18 9:19 consider 11:8 consistent 5:17 contained 13:5	contiguous 5:3 6:21 7:4 control 13:23 correct 7:22 13:8 costs 9:17 Council 1:2 2:5 5:23,25 11:14,15,22 11:24 12:15 12:17 Councilman 1:11,12,12 2:13,14 11:10 12:9 Councilwo... 1:11,13 2:2 2:12,19 3:10,17 6:5 6:9,11 7:13 7:17,23 8:3 8:10,14 10:7,19,22 10:25 11:5 11:18 12:4 12:7 covering 9:17 Cultural 1:4 2:6 3:24 8:21 12:22 current 9:15 currently 6:15 Curtis 1:12 12:10 D David 1:12 2:14 Department 9:8 Deputy 3:20 3:25 6:14 7:15,21 designation 4:22 difference 10:13 direct 13:23 dismiss 12:8 Dodge 9:5 donate 7:8 drives 7:5 Duly 11:17	E earning 4:22 easement 3:5 4:10 5:18 6:18 9:19 ecological 6:23 effort 9:24 ensure 9:21 environment 4:21 environmen... 5:12 evidence 13:4 F favor 4:3 8:24 11:25 favorable 5:22 10:4 11:13,21 12:14 fine 3:21 first 3:11,13 3:25 5:24 11:23 12:16 Focht 3:14,20 3:25 6:14 7:15,21 foregoing 13:7,20 formality 7:19 forward 3:12 8:4 fully 13:5 funding 10:16 further 11:22 G generated 10:17 go 11:7 good 2:2 3:17 3:22 6:11 7:23 8:10 8:12,19 granted 3:5 4:10 grants 9:16 Green 5:4	H H 8:6 half 10:10 Hall 1:7 happened 10:12 happy 6:2 10:5 hear 2:7 hearing 2:4,7 11:6 held 5:18 help 7:11 Henon 1:11 2:13 11:10 high 9:8 honored 4:17 I immediately 5:2 important 5:11 inception 4:20 incorporati... 3:7 4:13 informal 3:18 initiative 7:12 issues 5:13 J Jones 1:12 12:10 Jr 1:12 12:10 jurisdiction 6:22 K know 9:24 known 1:17 3:3 4:8 L L 13:14 land 1:17 3:3 3:5 4:8 5:12 6:16,18,21 6:21 9:5 Lands 1:16 2:25 4:6,11 5:9 6:15,24 8:7,23 9:11	Lane 1:17 3:4 legally 7:19 little 3:18 6:19 located 9:6 M Madam 11:11 maintenance 9:10 major 6:13 majority 9:13 making 7:19 management 6:23 Mark 3:14,19 3:25 6:6 matter 13:7 Mayor's 7:9 means 13:22 meeting 2:3 5:25 11:8 members 2:11,11 3:23 6:8 8:20 MICHELE 13:14 morning 2:3 3:18,19,22 6:12 8:11 8:12 motion 12:2 12:11 move 5:21 10:3 moved 11:12 11:19,22 municipal 4:18 MURPHY 13:14 N name 8:15,21 National 4:22 4:23 natural 1:16 2:25 3:5 4:6 4:10,21,23 5:9,17 6:15 6:24 8:7,23 9:11	NLT 5:16 non-profit 9:3 notes 13:6 noticed 3:21 O objections 13:4 Oh 1:12 2:14 Okay 7:13 10:19 open 9:15,22 opening 2:15 2:17 opportunity 8:18 opposed 12:5 order 2:4 9:12,21 ordinance 1:15 2:22 Originally 10:9 ownership 5:15 owns 6:15,17 P parcel 1:17 3:3,8 4:8,13 5:2,6,15 7:3 7:11 9:5 park 3:8 4:14 4:19,23 5:3 5:6 7:6 parkland 7:10,20 Parks 1:3 2:5 3:1,23 4:1,2 4:16 5:1,8 6:1,22 7:1 8:1,20 9:1,7 10:1 11:1 12:1,21 part 5:6 7:6 7:20 pass 5:5 pay 10:17 Pennsylvania 1:7 people 5:4 permanently 9:22
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Committee on Parks, Recreation and Cultural Affairs
September 30, 2015

Page 2

permit 5:24 11:23 12:16 permitted 11:15 Philadelphia 1:2,7 4:2,16 10:2 please 8:4,14 pleased 5:14 9:23 portfolio 6:25 7:2 portion 9:14 presence 2:10 12:9 PRESENT 1:10 preserving 5:16 President 8:7 8:23 prior 9:15 private 10:15 proceedings 13:4 program 7:9 prompted 6:13 properly 11:19 property 1:15 2:23 4:4 8:25 9:12 10:10 protect 9:13 public 1:15 2:4,7,23 4:4 8:25 11:6,7 13:15 purchase 10:18 purchased 9:11 10:9 purpose 2:7 purposes 6:24	R reached 6:18 read 2:20 11:15 reading 5:24 11:23 12:16 really 7:18 recognize 2:9 recommend... 5:22 10:4 11:13,21 12:14 record 8:15 Recreation 1:3 2:6 3:24 4:2,17 5:8 6:23 8:21 9:7 12:21 reevaluating 6:25 regard 9:9 regarding 11:3 region 5:13 regularly 6:20 relatively 7:2 remain 9:22 remarks 2:17 reported 11:20 12:13 reporter 13:24 reproduction 13:21 request 10:2 12:14 residences 10:16 respectfully 5:20 response 2:18 8:2 10:24 11:4 12:6 responsible 9:9 Reynolds 1:13 2:13 6:10 right 7:24 10:25 12:7 Road 5:4 Room 1:7	RPR-Notary 13:15 rules 5:23 11:14,22 12:15 S sale 10:17 save 9:16 says 10:10 Scott 8:6,22 seconded 11:17,19 September 1:8 serve 4:17 8:22 Service 4:24 session 11:16 11:24 12:16 Share 6:12 signifying 12:2 site 5:5 sloped 5:2 small 7:3 sold 10:15 space 9:16,22 state 5:17 8:15 stenographic 13:6 step 6:13 stewards 4:18 Street 1:17 3:4 4:9,25 9:6 subdivided 10:15 subdivision 9:18 subject 3:4 4:9 subsequently 9:19 supervision 13:23 suspended 5:24 11:14 11:23 12:15 system 5:7 T table 3:16 8:9	taken 11:9 13:6 terms 3:9 4:14 7:19 testify 3:12 3:13 4:3 8:5 8:24 11:3 testimony 2:8 2:16 6:6 8:16 10:11 Thank 3:10 6:4,5 7:14 7:16,17,24 8:17 10:7 10:20,21 11:10 12:19 thinks 7:6 thought 7:10 three 10:14 three-lot 9:18 time 9:15 title 1:16 2:20 4:6 9:3 today 5:5 7:5 tract 9:5,14 transcript 13:8,21 transferred 10:12 true 13:7 Trust 1:16 2:25 3:6 4:7 4:11 5:10 6:15,24 8:7 8:23 9:3,11 U understand 9:7 unique 4:21 urban 4:21 V Valley 3:6,8 4:12,14,19 5:3,4,10,19 6:16 9:20 Vice 8:7,22 W want 2:9 12:8 Watershed 3:7 4:12 5:11,19	6:17 9:20 We'll 11:7 We're 3:18 Wednesday 1:8 Wendle 8:6 8:12,17,22 10:14,21 willingness 7:8 Wissahickon 3:6,8 4:11 4:13,19,20 5:3,10,19 6:16 7:4 9:20 witness 3:11 3:13,15,15 8:5,8,8 wooded 5:2 woodland 9:13 worked 5:8 X Y year 6:19 years 5:9 Z 0 1 150475 1:15 2:8,21 3:1 4:1,4 5:1,21 6:1 7:1 8:1 8:24 9:1 10:1,3 11:1 11:7,11,20 12:1,12 1880s 4:20 1985 9:12,24 2 2015 1:8 3 30 1:8 4 400 1:7	5 500 7:10 6 6 1:16 3:2 4:7 7:3 9:4 6.2 9:14 10:11 7 7900 1:17 3:3 4:8,25 9:6 8 9 9 10:10 9.5 9:12 9/30/15 3:1 4:1 5:1 6:1 7:1 8:1 9:1 10:1 11:1 12:1 9:35 1:8 9:40 12:22		
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