

1 COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA

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3

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE
FY26 BUDGET

4

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City Hall, Room 400
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Wednesday, April 16, 2025
10:00 a.m.

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PRESENT:

9

COUNCIL PRESIDENT KENYATTA JOHNSON
10 COUNCILWOMAN KENDRA BROOKS
COUNCILWOMAN JAMIE GAUTHIER
11 COUNCILWOMAN KATHERINE GILMORE-RICHARDSON
COUNCILWOMAN QUETCY M. LOZADA
12 COUNCILWOMAN NINA AHMAD
COUNCILWOMAN CINDY BASS
13 COUNCILMAN MICHAEL DRISCOLL
COUNCILMAN CURTIS J. JONES, JR.
14 COUNCILMAN NICOLAS O'ROURKE
COUNCILMAN JEFFREY J. YOUNG, JR.
15 COUNCILMAN ANTHONY PHILLIPS
COUNCILMAN BRIAN O'NEILL
16 COUNCILMAN ISAIAH THOMAS

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HELEN LOUGHEAD, CLERK

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2 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

3 Ms. Loughead, would you
4 please call the roll to take
5 attendance of this outstanding
6 quorum?

7 THE CLERK: Councilmember
8 Squilla. Councilmember Gauthier.

9 COUNCILMEMBER GAUTHIER:
10 Present.

11 THE CLERK: Councilmember
12 Jones.

13 COUNCILMEMBER JONES:
14 Present.

15 THE CLERK: Councilmember
16 Young. Councilmember Driscoll.

17 COUNCILMEMBER DRISCOLL:
18 Ready.

19 THE CLERK: Councilmember
20 Lozada.

21 COUNCILMEMBER LOZADA:
22 Present.

23 THE CLERK: Councilmember
24 Bass.

1 COUNCILMEMBER BASS:

2 present.

3 THE CLERK: Councilmember

4 Phillips.

5 COUNCILMEMBER PHILLIPS:

6 Present.

7 THE CLERK: Councilmember

8 O'Neill. Councilmember Gilmore-

9 Richardson.

10 COUNCILMEMBER GILMORE-

11 RICHARDSON: Present.

12 THE CLERK: Councilmember

13 Thomas. Councilmember Harrity.

14 COUNCILMEMBER HARRITY: I

15 am present.

16 THE CLERK: Councilmember

17 Ahmad. Councilmember Landau.

18 Councilmember Brooks. Councilmember

19 O'Rourke.

20 COUNCILMEMBER O'ROURKE:

21 Present.

22 THE CLERK: Council

23 President Johnson.

24 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

1 Present.

2 A quorum of the committee
3 is present and we are now officially
4 called to order. Ms. Loughhead,
5 would you please read the title of
6 the resolutions.

7 THE CLERK: Bill No.
8 250-195, an ordinance amending
9 Chapter 19-1500 of the Philadelphia
10 Code entitled Wage and Net Profits
11 Tax by revising certain tax rates,
12 under certain terms and conditions.

13 Bill No. 250-196, an
14 ordinance adopting the operating
15 budget for fiscal year 2026.

16 Bill No. 250-197, an
17 ordinance to adopt to fiscal 2026,
18 capital budget.

19 Bill No. 250-198, an
20 ordinance to adopt a capital program
21 for the six fiscal years 2026
22 through 2031 inclusive.

23 Bill No. 250-199, an
24 ordinance amending Chapter 19-2600

1 of the Philadelphia Code entitled
2 Business Income and Receipts Taxes
3 to revise certain tax rates and end
4 certain exclusions from the tax on
5 receipts, all under certain terms
6 and conditions.

7 Bill No. 250-200, an
8 ordinance amending chapter 12-1000
9 of the Philadelphia Code entitled
10 Traffic Code to revise the fee for
11 the use of parking meters, all under
12 certain terms and conditions.

13 Bill No. 250-201, an
14 ordinance amending Chapter 19-1800
15 of the Philadelphia Code entitled
16 School Tax Authorization to provide
17 for an increase in the tax, the
18 Board of Education of the School
19 District of Philadelphia is
20 authorized to impose on real estate.

21 And amending Chapter
22 19-1300 entitled Real Estate Taxes
23 to establish an equivalent reduction
24 in the tax rate for the city real

1 estate tax, all under certain terms
2 and conditions.

3 Bill No. 250-202, an
4 ordinance amending Chapter 19-1806
5 of the Philadelphia Code entitled
6 Authorization of Realty Use and
7 Occupancy Tax to eliminate certain
8 exemptions all under certain terms
9 and conditions. Bill No. 250-210,
10 an ordinance amending Section
11 10-1001 of the Philadelphia Code,
12 entitled Fees of Commissioner of
13 Records to increase the portion of
14 fees for the recording of deeds and
15 mortgages and related documents to
16 be used for housing trust fund
17 purposes, under certain terms and
18 conditions.

19 Bill No. 250-211,
20 an ordinance amending Section --
21 Chapter 19-1400 of the Philadelphia
22 Code entitled Realty Transfer Tax by
23 revising the rate of the tax, all
24 under certain terms and conditions.

1 Bill No. 250-212, an
2 ordinance to amend Chapter 19-4400
3 of the Philadelphia Code entitled
4 Development Impact Tax to end the
5 imposition of the tax, under certain
6 terms and conditions.

7 Resolution No. 250-214, a
8 resolution providing for the
9 approval by the Council of the City
10 of Philadelphia of a revised five-
11 year financial plan for the City of
12 Philadelphia covering fiscal years
13 2026 through 2030 and incorporating
14 revisions with respect to fiscal
15 year 2025, which is to be submitted
16 by the Mayor to the Pennsylvania
17 Intergovernmental Cooperation
18 Authority pursuant to an
19 Intergovernmental Cooperation
20 Agreement by between the city and
21 the authority.

22 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

23 Thank you very much,

24 Ms. Loughhead.

1 Today we will continue the
2 public hearing of the Committee of
3 the Whole to consider the bills read
4 by the clerk that constitute
5 proposed operating capital spending
6 measures for fiscal year 2026, a
7 capital program and forward-Looking
8 capital plan for fiscal year 2026
9 through fiscal year 2031.

10 This morning we have
11 scheduled testimony from the Free
12 Library, as well as the Department
13 of Parks and Recreation. This
14 afternoon we will have scheduled
15 testimony from the Southeastern
16 Pennsylvania Transportation
17 Authority, better known as SEPTA.

18 Ms. Loughead, could you
19 please call up the first panel to
20 testify?

21 THE CLERK: Kelly Richards,
22 President and Director of the Free
23 Library, and we will also have Susan
24 Slawson, Commissioner for Parks and

1 Rec.

2 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

3 First and foremost, I just
4 want to say good morning and welcome
5 and thank you for being here as you
6 present your testimony on behalf of
7 the administration.

8 As always, I just want to
9 take a moment I want publicly have a
10 chance, to acknowledge the hard work
11 and dedication of the Commissioner
12 of Park & Recreation.

13 Welcome back, Sue Slawson,
14 and thank you for just always being
15 responsive and your leadership as it
16 relates to how we continue to move
17 forward with our park and
18 recreational facilities.

19 I also want to acknowledge
20 my good friend I see sitting over
21 there, who I had conversation with
22 this morning, just about every other
23 day regarding constituent services
24 matters, Mr. Frank Fabey.

1 And also just want to give
2 a shout out to Aparna and Francesco
3 for always making sure when doing
4 the revitalization of my park and
5 recreational -- my parks and
6 playgrounds, they're always
7 responsive to making sure we're on
8 target to revitalize the park and
9 recreational facilities inside my
10 district. So I just want to
11 publicly just say thank you and
12 overall your team.

13 And also, I know we have
14 some good news that we are here in
15 this presentation by Mr. Richards.
16 Thank you for your leadership with
17 the Philadelphia Public Library,
18 making sure we are up and running.

19 I think we up to six days
20 and you'll talk more about the
21 robust things that we're doing in
22 terms of making sure our young
23 people are receiving the best
24 experience when they go to our

1 libraries and overall the community
2 as a whole. So Kelly, I always like
3 the work that you are doing and I
4 look forward to your presentation.

5 And we're going to start
6 with the ladies first, with Ms. Sue
7 Slawson, Chairperson of Park and
8 Recreation. Just state your name,
9 for the record, and please begin
10 your testimony.

11 MS. SLAWSON: Good morning,
12 Council President. Susan Slawson,
13 S-L-A-W-S-O-N. I want to say thank
14 you for those comments. And I am
15 the Commissioner of Parks and
16 Recreation.

17 With me today, are Marissa
18 Washington, first Deputy
19 Commissioner, and Susan Buck, Deputy
20 Commissioner for Operations. And
21 it's a pleasure to be here.

22 I appear before you to
23 present our proposed operating
24 budget for fiscal year 2026, which

1 includes a general fund obligation
2 of \$83,535,660. A decrease of
3 \$7,384,841 from fiscal year 2025
4 estimated obligation levels.

5 This decrease is primarily
6 due to one-time payments for
7 contracted bonuses and site
8 preparations for special events in
9 2026 and non-recurring FY25 youth
10 sports funding.

11 In addition to the
12 department's stewardship of
13 Philadelphia's treasure parks and
14 natural lands, we are continuing to
15 develop and expand programs that
16 advance the Mayor's vision for a
17 safer, cleaner, and greener
18 Philadelphia.

19 In the fall of 2024, the
20 youth sports and anti-violence
21 initiative provided 244,000 and
22 travel grants through the
23 Philadelphia City Fund to 32
24 football and cheer teams, an average

1 of \$7,625 per team who qualified for
2 national tournaments in other
3 states.

4 Many of these organizations
5 will also once again have the
6 opportunity to participate in
7 coaching clinics that cover both the
8 physical fundamentals as well as
9 mental health strategies that
10 coaches can employ to support their
11 young athletes.

12 In spring 2025, we are
13 providing \$218,000 in grants and
14 partnerships with Philadelphia Youth
15 Sports Collision to support 70
16 organizations with grants ranging
17 from \$500 to \$5,000. Thirty-four
18 organizations received \$5,000. PYSC
19 is launching a second round in late
20 summer -- the late summer of 2025
21 with a continued focus on those
22 underserved communities.

23 As a part of the youth
24 sports and anti-violence initiative,

1 these efforts across organizations,
2 sports, and communities will create
3 more safe spaces citywide for young
4 people to learn, play, and grow.

5 As we provide services to
6 the residents of Philadelphia
7 throughout the year, we remain
8 focused on providing safe spaces for
9 Philadelphia's youth through 95
10 after school programs, hosting 2,200
11 youth, serving over 322,000 meals
12 during the school year, hosting 220
13 Play Streets and offering summer
14 camps for 6,700 youth.

15 Our targeted enforcement
16 program operates from Memorial Day
17 weekend to the late September with
18 support from our Rangers,
19 Philadelphia Police Department,
20 Advisory Councils and neighbors.

21 We also continue to
22 prioritize safe spaces in
23 Kensington, and we are grateful for
24 partners such as Impact Services,

1 Friends Groups, the Police
2 Department, and the Free Library.
3 Together, we will provide
4 programming at McPherson, Hissey,
5 Hope and Harrogate Park, as well as
6 after school programs at Heitzman,
7 Rivera and Schmidt.

8 As we care for our
9 citizens, we are mindful of the
10 powerful connection and the positive
11 impact that green spaces provide for
12 communities.

13 As stewards of
14 Philadelphia's natural lands, PPR
15 sustainability unit works to
16 maintain, increase and protect
17 natural resources across the city.
18 The team continues its workforce
19 development efforts to provide
20 hands-on restoration training
21 through PowerCorpsPHL. Staff will
22 also continue to assess over 100
23 illegal dumping hotspots on park
24 land.

1 We continue our partnership
2 with the Police Department's
3 Environmental Crime Unit to issue
4 violations for illegal dumping in
5 Fairmount Park. Urban Forestry Tree
6 team manages over 130,000 street
7 trees. The regional crews manage
8 10,000 plus acres of park land. And
9 storm emergencies and natural lands
10 teams is responsible for 5,000 plus
11 acres of forest metals and wetlands.

12 The growth and care of our
13 urban forest is an environmental
14 justice issue. There are fewer
15 trees where there is more poverty in
16 black and brown communities. Our
17 Urban Forestry Unit and the
18 Department of Commerce are
19 partnering in a commercial corridor
20 tree planting and care program to
21 plant trees and train taking care of
22 business ambassadors to care for
23 them.

24 To date, 468 trees have

1 been planted and 40 TCB ambassadors
2 have been trained and paid to take
3 care of the trees through this
4 partnerships.

5 In closing, many of you
6 have seen the transformative power
7 of Rebuild. It has revitalized
8 long, neglected facilities like
9 Vare, Rivera, Heitzman, and others.
10 But even at these renewed sites,
11 there's work that still needs to be
12 done. I hope together we can come
13 up with a plan that fully
14 revitalizes PPR sites and focuses on
15 challenges like lighting and
16 pavements.

17 Thank you for this
18 opportunity to discuss our
19 department with you today, and I
20 look forward to your questions.

21 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
22 Thank you very much. Before we hear
23 the testimony from Kelly Richards
24 for the Free Library, I want to

1 acknowledge on the presence of
2 Councilmember Kendra Brooks,
3 Councilman Member Jeffrey J. Young,
4 Councilmember Isaiah Thomas.

5 Mr. Richards, the floor is
6 yours.

7 MR. RICHARDS: Thank you.

8 Good morning President
9 Johnson and members of City Council.
10 I'm Kelly Richards, President
11 Director of the Free Library.

12 Joining me today is Stephen
13 Maccari, our finance director, and
14 Tyreice DuPass, our property
15 management director. And we have
16 others from the Free Library team
17 here today, too. So I'm pleased to
18 provide testimony on the Free
19 Library's fiscal year of 2026
20 operating budget.

21 Our mission at the Free
22 Library is to advance literacy,
23 guide learning, inspire curiosity as
24 part of the Mayor's vision to

1 provide a world-class educational
2 opportunity for Philadelphians of
3 all ages and socio-economic
4 backgrounds.

5 Our plans for fiscal year
6 of 2026 at this pivotal moment in
7 our society, public spaces,
8 especially libraries are more
9 essential than ever. We need
10 trusted sources of information,
11 places for connection and spaces
12 where individuals can be themselves,
13 discover new passions or lose
14 themselves in curiosity and
15 creativity.

16 The Free Library of
17 Philadelphia provides invaluable
18 resources to our community and its
19 role is critical today as it has
20 ever been in our city's history.
21 Aligned with the Mayor Park's
22 vision, the Free Library is part of
23 creating a safer, cleaner, greener
24 spaces in every neighborhood and

1 access to economic opportunity for
2 all.

3 We are dedicated to
4 uplifting and fulfilling the vital
5 work we do every single day,
6 providing necessary services and
7 support for residents and
8 communities. As we move forward
9 with our strategic planning process,
10 the Free Library is excited to share
11 our vision and commitment to the
12 future.

13 Currently in the engagement
14 phase, we are connecting with
15 internal and community stakeholders
16 to gather insights that will guide
17 the development of a comprehensive
18 plan for the library's future.

19 These efforts will not only enhance
20 service delivery, but also ensure
21 exceptional customer service for
22 everyone who walks through the
23 library's doors.

24 The Free Library is deeply

1 committed to fostering a more
2 inclusive and welcoming environment
3 by expanding our outreach efforts,
4 developing the new community
5 engagement and volunteer services
6 division. We are ensuring that our
7 community programming reflects the
8 diverse needs of the people we
9 serve.

10 These initiatives are
11 designed to ensure that the library
12 authentically reflects the rich
13 diversity of our community and
14 provide services that are accessible
15 to all.

16 In addition, we are focused
17 on expanding access and engagement
18 across the city by increasing our
19 public service hours. After the
20 successful rollout of Saturday
21 service at many libraries, we are
22 now working toward continuing to
23 extend Saturday public service hours
24 to all libraries and eventually

1 including Sunday service hours at
2 key locations by FY27.

3 Combined with strength and
4 community outreach, partnerships
5 with local nonprofits and other city
6 agencies, these efforts will
7 continue to position the library as
8 a continued vital hub for civic
9 engagement, workforce development,
10 and lifelong learning for all
11 residents.

12 As we grow, we're all --
13 we're also prioritizing critical
14 infrastructure improvements to our
15 buildings and information technology
16 to enhance the services we provide
17 for both patrons and staff. We're
18 planning a comprehensive facilities
19 assessment for fiscal year '26.

20 We have several
21 improvements to our buildings and
22 HVAC systems to meet critical needs
23 to keep libraries open. We're
24 committed to updating our beautiful

1 historic facilities to ensure we
2 continue delivering a world-class
3 user experience.

4 With the ongoing support of
5 our Deputy Managing Director Dave
6 Wilson and the managing director's
7 office, the Free Library board of
8 trustees, city leaders, staff and
9 community partners, the Free Library
10 will remain a safe, accessible, and
11 welcoming space for all
12 Philadelphians to learn, grow, and
13 to connect.

14 The Free Library of
15 Philadelphia is proud to be a place
16 where connections are made and where
17 everyone can find a sense of
18 belonging. So thank you for your
19 continued support as we work
20 together to shape the future of this
21 invaluable, awesome institution.

22 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

23 Thank you very much. Just
24 a couple brief questions before I

1 turn it over to my members. Also, I
2 want to acknowledge the presence of
3 -- I think I said Brooks already,
4 correct? All right. Making sure.
5 Dr. Nina Ahmad, Councilmember Mark
6 Squilla. I'll announce their
7 presence, for the record.

8 Commissioner Sue Slawson,
9 give me an idea of the status of the
10 master plan and the progress we're
11 making regarding FDR Park. I know
12 it started under the prior
13 administration, a significant
14 commitment under Jim Kenney. Under
15 this administration, we still want
16 to make sure that we complete the
17 work that has put -- has started.

18 And I know the Mayor's a
19 champion of -- on the revitalization
20 of FDR Park, because we were down
21 there together, talking about the
22 great fields that we're going to
23 have, how we're going to revitalize
24 the space as relates to 2026, when

1 the World Cup is coming across the
2 street at the Lincoln Financial
3 Field. So just give us an update on
4 that particular project.

5 MS. SLAWSON: So to let you
6 know, the FDR Park project, those
7 places and spaces have been funded
8 completely. The gateway phase has
9 been funded completely, the nature
10 phase has been funded completely,
11 the picnic and pet play phase has
12 also been funded completely. And I
13 can give you a description of those.

14 The gateway phase is the
15 Anna Verna -- part of the gateway
16 phase is the Anna Verna playground,
17 open Fall of 2023. Park wide bike
18 lane, America's largest swings, 3
19 acre inclusive and sustainable play
20 space. A new parking lot with storm
21 water, lights and cameras. New
22 waterline, waste water lines, and
23 electrical connections for the park,
24 and a Patterson Lagoon restoration.

1 And then there's the
2 Gateway Plaza, which will be opening
3 -- actual ribbon cutting this
4 spring. Way finding information to
5 help visitors navigate the park,
6 mistifiers for cooling off on a warm
7 day, seating groves with benches for
8 meeting friends and family, rain
9 gardens that create native plants
10 and flowering understory canopy to
11 absorb storm water. Bike recs to
12 welcome cyclists, raised pedestrian
13 crossing at the Park Loop Road,
14 lighting and security cameras.

15 And then we have the
16 Welcome Center, which should be
17 opening this spring as well. LEED
18 Gold Historic Preservation project,
19 public information and welcome
20 center, 6,000 square feet, new
21 offices for park staff, 22,000
22 square feet. A welcome terrace,
23 food and beverage concessions,
24 community and meeting spaces, new

1 parking lots, storm water management
2 lights and cameras.

3 Phase 1 of the five-park
4 loop trail. All of this has already
5 been funded. And with that you also
6 have the construction of a five
7 multipurpose fields, which is what
8 -- and four basketball courts.

9 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

10 And so give me the status of the
11 five multipurpose fields, basketball
12 courts and where we're at in terms
13 of the funding of that phase.

14 MS. SLAWSON: That's been
15 funded as well. The project is not
16 moving yet, but it will be moving,
17 but it has been funded completely.

18 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

19 So it has been funded completely?

20 MS. SLAWSON: It has.

21 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

22 Okay.

23 MS. SLAWSON: Yes.

24 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

1 All right. Thank you for that
2 update.

3 There was an investment of
4 \$2.5 million in youth sports
5 initiatives in 2025, but we're only
6 requesting \$500,000 for FY26. And
7 so give me an idea of why the
8 significant decrease in the funding
9 requests from last year to this year
10 regarding sports youth initiatives?

11 And then also, I think this
12 is also relevant for the sports
13 fund, which I think was a brilliant
14 idea of the Mayor. How do
15 organizations that want to apply for
16 this funding?

17 MS. SLAWSON: And so we are
18 in partnership with PYSC, as well as
19 Philadelphia City Fund, and we are
20 opening up. We just closed the
21 spring grants, they're going to be
22 opening up opportunities for summer
23 grants as well.

24 And the -- so the actual

1 funding that the Mayor gave us was
2 \$3 million, President Johnson. And
3 we will be getting an additional
4 \$500,000 in our budget. But some of
5 the funding was used for supplies
6 that we will not have to purchase
7 again. And, you know, one of the
8 things is we are -- we were lacking
9 in updated equipment in our
10 facilities. And we have enough
11 funding to supply additional
12 equipment, upgraded equipment in all
13 of our sites.

14 One of the things that
15 we're going to do also is a boxing
16 program. So we have the funding to
17 purchase all of the equipment for
18 the boxing program. We won't need
19 that funding again in our budget.
20 So a lot of what we're doing, we
21 need funding for one-time purchases
22 and that \$500,000 will assist us in
23 making sure we'll be able to provide
24 the grants for next year for these

1 -- for these teams and community
2 people that need support.

3 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

4 Okay. I just have one request. If
5 you and your team could work with
6 members regarding that process,
7 right? Because it's operated by a
8 third party, which is good, but
9 however, we need to make sure we
10 have that connection, and so when
11 members have individual
12 constituencies that want to apply,
13 then we are aware that this upcoming
14 summer we can relay that information
15 to the youth groups in our
16 individual districts to actually
17 apply for the funding.

18 And I think it's great
19 because our children shouldn't have
20 to be on the highways on the middle
21 of the streets with their handout
22 asking for money where we should be
23 supporting, which I consider our
24 best assets in the city of

1 Philadelphia, which are our
2 children, so.

3 MS. SLAWSON: Council
4 President Johnson, I will make sure
5 today that we will get information
6 over to you so you can ensure that
7 all the other council members can
8 notify the constituents how to apply
9 for the next round of funding.

10 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
11 And last question before I go on to
12 Mr. Richards. We know every year,
13 particularly during the summer,
14 right, we anticipate, right, more
15 youth are outside, more youth are on
16 the playgrounds, more youth are on
17 the basketball courts. And it's
18 inevitable, unfortunately, that we
19 see some level of gun violence
20 taking place on our basketball
21 courts.

22 What are we doing to be
23 proactive and from a prevention
24 standpoint to the best of our

1 ability to be in front of this
2 issue? I know we work in
3 partnership with the Philadelphia
4 Police Department, but they can't be
5 everywhere, right? And I know we
6 also work with the advisory boards
7 -- the advisory council and members
8 of the neighborhood to self-police,
9 you know, our parks and recreational
10 facilities. But also, I just want
11 to get an idea from your perspective
12 different strategies what we are
13 doing.

14 For instance, are we
15 turning off the lights at 9:00 p.m.
16 so young people won't be hanging out
17 in the park, similar to what
18 happened in my district in Southwest
19 Philadelphia. Give me an idea where
20 we're at?

21 MS. SLAWSON: And so our
22 hours during the summer are 9:00 to
23 9:00. And I believe you really did
24 hit it. It's really key that we

1 make sure that lights are out at
2 9:00, that the facilities that we
3 have that we can shut gates, that
4 the gates are locked.

5 And of course, we don't
6 have gates at all of our sites, but
7 the gates that we do have, we are --
8 we're leaning on our park rangers a
9 lot more as well, or we are in the
10 process of just trying to make sure
11 that those places where we have
12 gates and we can ensure that the
13 gates are closed.

14 The other thing that helps
15 us is to ensure that the lighting
16 that's needed in our sites, that
17 they're out on the fields until it's
18 time to close the gates. Because
19 you really don't really -- you
20 really don't want to get -- most
21 criminals are not going to do
22 something --

23 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

24 In the light.

1 MS. SLAWSON: -- when
2 there's a lot of light, right?

3 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
4 Yes.

5 MS. SLAWSON: They want it
6 to be dark. So while our facilities
7 are open, one of the goals is to
8 increase our lighting in our
9 facilities, those areas in our
10 playgrounds, those areas on our
11 fields where there's limited
12 lighting, we are working to try to
13 improve the lighting to make sure
14 that parents and kids and family
15 members feel safe when they're
16 outside at our playgrounds.

17 And one of the key things
18 that I mentioned, I think it was
19 last week, is that we need community
20 members.

21 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
22 I'm with you on the
23 community members side. Have we
24 ever thought as a city to engage in

1 public-private, like real security?
2 Because just being frank, even
3 though Ms. Maymay from the
4 neighborhood and Ms. Maymay in the
5 park, or, you know, Saleem from the
6 neighborhood, he in the park,
7 sometimes, though, without having
8 that visible -- that visible
9 presence of authority, you know,
10 some young people still just brazen
11 and still will take a life
12 irregardless.

13 But sometime that official
14 authority, right, kind of make you
15 think twice about it. So have we
16 ever thought about maybe doing a
17 public-private partnership in
18 bringing in third party security to
19 supplement the Philadelphia Police
20 Department in areas where they can't
21 be?

22 MS. SLAWSON: Are we
23 talking about armed or are we
24 talking about security guards?

1 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

2 We could do either one. I know
3 armed, we not supposed to have
4 firearms inside the park.

5 MS. SLAWSON: Right.

6 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

7 So this body banned that, right?
8 Even if it's not -- for instance,
9 you take University City, right,
10 they have one of the models where
11 the individuals who are patrolling
12 in the neighborhood, right, and
13 they're out there all times of the
14 night. You'll think twice because
15 there's a visible presence of
16 authority monitoring what's taking
17 place. So even if it's non-armed,
18 have we ever thought about that?

19 MS. SLAWSON: We have,
20 Council President Johnson.

21 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

22 Okay.

23 MS. SLAWSON: We've thought
24 about it. And I think it's

1 something for us to consider. One
2 of the things that we've discussed
3 is if there is a security guard
4 inside and that's what he's being
5 paid to do, we would also have to
6 think about having presence outside.

7 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
8 Absolutely.

9 MS. SLAWSON: Because
10 they're going to stick to what their
11 job description says. And so now
12 we're talking about additional
13 funding, we're talking about
14 additional --

15 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
16 We have an \$8 billion budget and
17 we're talking about the safety of
18 our children. So we spare no
19 expense to keep our children safe.

20 MS. SLAWSON: And so we are
21 talking about having guards inside,
22 outside. And I think one of the
23 things that also helps is that if we
24 could also just fill our compliment

1 that we currently have and have the
2 staff that we need in our
3 facilities, if we're bringing in
4 security to work along with the
5 security that we are talking about.

6 So I think it's something
7 we definitely we've had
8 conversations about and we could
9 continue to revisit and come up with
10 a plan on how that could definitely
11 support the safety of our young
12 people. And it's just everyone that
13 comes to our facility, it's not just
14 our young people. It's everybody
15 that comes and wants to be a part of
16 community at our recreation centers
17 at our parks.

18 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
19 I'm with you. But the ones that are
20 being shot and murdered are our
21 young people.

22 MS. SLAWSON: They are.

23 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
24 So I have to say that respectfully.

1 So I do want to do a follow-up. We
2 can talk offline, but I think we
3 know it's coming during the summer.
4 We can anticipate it. And that's
5 unfortunate, right? And so at what
6 point do we do something different,
7 because the police can't be
8 everywhere. Maybe they'll be in a
9 high-crime areas, but at some point
10 in time, we got to think about how
11 we approach this differently.

12 And I believe, yeah, we
13 could recruit people from the
14 neighborhood, right? But also I
15 just believe that the official
16 presence make people make think
17 twice before they engage in
18 something that's not becoming of our
19 neighborhood.

20 And so I'll be willing to
21 work with you. And from this body,
22 and I know members will support me
23 on this, we would spare no expense.
24 This is a negotiation process, and

1 so for us to advocate for what we
2 believe is in best interest of
3 keeping our children safe.

4 The Chair recognizes
5 Councilmember Jamie Gauthier.

6 COUNCILMEMBER GAUTHIER:

7 Quick point of information,
8 Council President. You brought up
9 University City District from my --
10 from my district, but I actually
11 wanted to point to Level Up Philly
12 and suggest that we talk to them and
13 maybe partner with them.

14 I've been to their after-
15 school spot several times. Pastor
16 Aaron Campbell, he does have
17 security there, but he also has kids
18 from all over the city, sometimes
19 hundreds of kids. These are kids
20 that have been involved in violence,
21 some of them are involved with
22 street groups, but they come
23 together peacefully at Level Up.
24 And so I think it's a model for what

1 we could do in our rec centers.

2 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

3 Thank you very much.

4 MS. SLAWSON: And I would
5 look forward to having that
6 conversation with you because
7 whatever we can do to prevent any
8 more of these homicides, we are
9 willing to do whatever we can.

10 It's not just traumatic for
11 the parents, the children, the
12 relatives, it is -- it is traumatic
13 for our staff. Our staff members
14 that have to run out and try to save
15 the lives of the young people that
16 have been attacked, whether it's a
17 weapon, whether it's a fight, this
18 affects our community all around.

19 And so however we can work
20 together to identify support to make
21 sure that our young people are safe,
22 I'm willing to have that
23 conversation.

24 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

1 Thank you, Commissioner Slawson.

2 Mr. Richards.

3 MR. RICHARDS: Yeah.

4 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

5 How many days are we operating
6 currently? And I know you want to
7 go to seven days a week, just give
8 us an idea on that strategy. And
9 then last, we know that we had to
10 shut down 20 libraries due to AC
11 issues, heating issues. And so if
12 we are operating six days, we're
13 going to seven days, obviously one
14 of the things we should be
15 advocating for is a robust capital
16 campaign to fix up our actual
17 library system. Because I'm sure
18 the infrastructure is pretty old,
19 and so give us an update.

20 MR. RICHARDS: Well,
21 Council President, the budgets that
22 we've received the last couple of
23 years have really been significant
24 to do something to move the Free

1 Library forward in a very positive
2 and optimistic way to serve our
3 neighbors and serve every community.
4 We have advanced our library
5 services to where we're pretty much
6 stable five days a week.

7 And right now we have 30 --
8 about 30 locations open on
9 Saturdays. That's 30 out of the 54.
10 So our objective is to hire about --
11 about another 50 more full-time and
12 about 57 part-time people with our
13 municipal guards.

14 And once we reach that
15 figure, we believe -- we know we'll
16 be able to open six days a week
17 consistently throughout the system,
18 and then we'll be able to provide
19 Sunday hours. And that's something
20 we have not done in a very, very
21 long time. And could you -- what
22 was the second question? Oh, the
23 capital --

24 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

1 Capital Plan campaign. We shut down
2 20 libraries.

3 MR. RICHARDS: Yeah. We've
4 got --

5 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
6 Due to faulty heating and faulty air
7 conditioning. So tell me about the
8 capital plant plan.

9 MR. RICHARDS: Yeah. We've
10 got some very beautiful old
11 buildings with old infrastructure.
12 I was looking at some of the dates
13 of some of the boilers before we
14 came today, and some of them date to
15 the 60s. And now that we're open
16 more, you know, you can look at
17 global warming and all of that, too.

18 And we are utilizing the
19 building more warming and cooling
20 centers. We're putting a lot of
21 strain on some of those systems.

22 So what we have done and we
23 put in the budget and the Mayor's
24 budget was a facilities conditioning

1 assessment, which will give us the
2 ability instead of running,
3 searching emergencies, now we'll
4 have a strategic plan that will put
5 in a hierarchy of our boiler issues,
6 our -- and based on cost, too. Our
7 boiler issues, our mechanical
8 issues, roofing. It'll give us the
9 ability to be very strategic and
10 costing out and budgeting for in a
11 way dealing with priorities, all of
12 the issues we are confronted with
13 that we're seeing with our
14 buildings, but we're not waiting for
15 that. In the interim, our teams are
16 working with the capital project
17 office. We're looking at the issues
18 we have now in prioritizing those.
19 So that is where we are right now in
20 that particular effort.

21 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
22 What's the overall cost of the
23 capital campaign?

24 MR. RICHARDS: Well, if

1 we're looking, you know, at what --

2 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

3 How much are you requesting in this
4 particular budget?

5 MR. RICHARDS: In this --

6 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

7 How much are you requesting in this
8 budget?

9 MR. RICHARDS: In this
10 particular budget, our -- for '26
11 is, I believe it's 3,850,000.

12 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

13 And have you anticipated your
14 overall capital campaign number?

15 MR. RICHARDS: That will --
16 that will be able to address some of
17 the emergency issues that we see
18 going into this particular year.

19 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

20 Okay. I just want to go on the
21 record. I think my members agree
22 with me. This is something that's
23 critical to -- the Chair recognizes
24 Councilmember Brooks.

1 COUNCILMEMBER BROOKS: Just
2 a point of information, I was
3 wondering for the staffing needs, do
4 you have a plan to recruit the staff
5 that you need to kind of build up?
6 Because I think there were some
7 shortages that were happening
8 throughout the system. So is it a
9 hiring plan? And towards the
10 building needs, you asked for what,
11 the 3 million -- I wrote it down,
12 3,850,000. Is there a five-year
13 plan? Because you only talked about
14 emergency repairs.

15 MR. RICHARDS: Yes.

16 COUNCILMEMBER BROOKS: What
17 is the long-term strategic plan to
18 maintain the library system and can
19 we plan for that so we are not just
20 piecemealing this as we go along?

21 MR. RICHARDS: We -- good.
22 A very good question, Councilmember.
23 We do have a five-year plan, but the
24 five-year plan isn't based on this

1 facilities condition assessment
2 report. Once we get that, we'll be
3 able to have better data to revise
4 that five-year plan.

5 The five-year plan now is
6 just based on what we see, but once
7 we get that facilities condition
8 assessment report, that very
9 strategic report, which will be able
10 to prioritize those particular needs
11 that we have, even knowing, and even
12 in the midst of that, we'll still
13 have some emergencies that pop up.

14 But that plan will give us
15 our best guide, and that's something
16 that we don't have and haven't, and
17 it will be a guide for us to be able
18 to put a plan together to bring
19 before you.

20 COUNCILMEMBER BROOKS: And
21 the reason I'm asking, I would hate
22 for the --

23 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
24 Member Brooks, regarding the point

1 of information, we're going to wait
2 until it's your line of questioning;
3 is that okay?

4 COUNCILMEMBER BROOKS:

5 That's fine.

6 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

7 Because it's really just providing
8 -- you're providing information --
9 doing the point of information. Now
10 we are engaging in questioning and
11 as relates to the presentation, so
12 when we get to your time, we're
13 going to call you so you can
14 officially --

15 COUNCILMEMBER BROOKS:

16 Okay.

17 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

18 --- do a double down regarding his
19 responses.

20 The Chair, before we turn
21 it over to members, recognizes
22 Councilmember Curtis Jones.

23 COUNCILMEMBER JONES: Thank
24 you so much. So I'm excited about

1 the plans for FDR Park. I mean, I'm
2 going to bring --

3 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
4 What are you talking about?

5 COUNCILMEMBER JONES: I get
6 it. No, I get it.

7 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
8 I don't have Tiger Woods in my
9 district.

10 COUNCILMEMBER JONES: No, I
11 get it, I get it, right.

12 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
13 I don't have Tiger.

14 COUNCILMEMBER JONES: But
15 I'm going to use the two of you in
16 your proximity to illustrate the
17 proximity between the Wynnefield
18 Library and John Anderson Center.
19 They're right next door to each
20 other. They share a space, right?
21 The majority leader is a Wynnefield
22 person, so she understands what I'm
23 saying.

24 How -- and almost similar

1 to what Member Brooks is talking
2 about, on a strategic plan, you
3 share the same roof. You share the
4 same HVAC. Do you talk about how to
5 maximize those efficiencies?
6 Because you share a space together,
7 how you can be cost effective in the
8 renovation of that facility and the
9 timing of those renovations? I
10 raised that because we've put the
11 money in for the renovations years
12 ago, but we have not seen shovel in
13 the ground. And I can't understand
14 that.

15 In Wynnefield, as my
16 commissioner knows, that's the town
17 hall. That's where all of the
18 community groups come to go. And we
19 have to -- we have to be a little
20 more strategic on facilities that we
21 co-operate. How we can create a
22 plan to do that, that's No. 1.
23 Number 2, during the -- not Liquor
24 Buy The Drink, the sugary beverage

1 tax, we were promised a group of
2 workers under Frank Fabey, the
3 famous Frank Fabey. Is he here?

4 MS. SLAWSON: He is.

5 COUNCILMEMBER JONES:

6 Because he's actually a myth. Is he
7 actually in here? There he is.

8 MS. SLAWSON: He's here.

9 COUNCILMEMBER JONES: He's
10 actually -- he exists. We were
11 supposed to get a workforce of
12 trained workers under him. I know
13 we hired him, but it's my
14 understanding, under your watch, I'm
15 going to say it three times, not
16 under your watch, not under your --
17 that those positions were then used
18 to backfill people that retired. So
19 therefore it was not a net gain.

20 We were told that if we
21 paid out of the budget for the
22 materials, we'd have the labor, this
23 would be a more efficient time-wise
24 production of renovation of needed

1 -- of renovations in our smaller
2 facilities. Those two questions.
3 My first round: joint shared
4 footprints, are you working
5 together, and what happened to our
6 laborers?

7 MR. RICHARDS: Well, I
8 guess, I'll start. One of the
9 things with we're doing with the
10 Capital Projects Office is we all
11 are working together.

12 COUNCILMEMBER JONES: Say
13 that again.

14 MR. RICHARDS: What -- from
15 the -- Kelly, Free Library, we are
16 all working together with the
17 Capital Projects Office on these
18 projects where we're rebuilding and
19 remodeling, especially if the rec
20 center and the library is aligned
21 and close together instead of --

22 COUNCILMEMBER JONES: So
23 give me the example of Wynnefield
24 and Anderson, how's that working

1 together, that case in specific?

2 MR. RICHARDS: I believe
3 that particular question would
4 probably be best --

5 MS. SLAWSON: Could I --
6 could I -- could I, sir, please,
7 Councilman.

8 COUNCILMEMBER JONES: Sure.

9 MS. SLAWSON: If I could
10 ask for a Aparna Palantino, who is
11 now in charge of capital projects to
12 come up and respond to that.

13 COUNCILMEMBER JONES:
14 Perfect.

15 MS. SLAWSON: Thank you.

16 MS. Palantino: Aparna
17 Palantino, Director Capital Program
18 Office.

19 Councilmember Jones, thank
20 you for your question. So one of
21 the most important facets of rebuild
22 was to prioritize sites that are
23 co-located. So Wynnefield Library
24 and Anderson Cultural Center being a

1 prime example of that. So as to not
2 disrupt operations, Wynnefield is
3 actually under construction
4 currently with an outdoor renovation
5 and classroom space expected to be
6 completed later this summer, as soon
7 as the grass establishes. And John
8 C. Anderson, once that's completed,
9 John C. Anderson Cultural Center is
10 actually in design and construction
11 will begin right afterwards.

12 COUNCILMEMBER JONES: So to
13 answer my question, on shared
14 properties, you have an efficiency
15 plan --

16 MS. Palantino: Yes.

17 COUNCILMEMBER JONES: --
18 that says if I have to replace the
19 HVAC in one, we might as well extend
20 it to the other and get it done in
21 one stroke?

22 MS. Palantino: Yes. So we
23 evaluate the HVAC -- every system
24 for the individual assets. In the

1 case of Anderson and Wynnefield, we
2 are actually separating the HVACs,
3 so John C. Anderson will get a
4 separate dedicated HVAC system.

5 COUNCILMEMBER JONES: So I
6 would dare to use the W word, like
7 when is that going to happen?

8 MS. Palantino: That will
9 start in the late summer, early
10 fall.

11 COUNCILMEMBER JONES: Got
12 you on the record. Thank you very
13 much. The Frank Fabey question.

14 MS. Palantino: I cannot
15 answer that. I don't want to speak
16 for Parks and Rec, sorry.

17 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
18 The Chair recognizes Councilmember
19 Majority Gilmore-Richardson.

20 COUNCILMEMBER GILMORE-
21 RICHARDSON: Thank you,
22 Mr. President. Quickly, I'd just
23 like to thank Councilmember Jones.
24 I rise with a parliamentary inquiry

1 regarding the statement from Aparna.

2 If you could give us the
3 exact times, I couldn't hear you.
4 The exact month and year for the
5 John C. Anderson Cultural Center
6 Project.

7 MS. Palantino: The John C.
8 Anderson Cultural Center project is
9 in design, wrapping up design. So
10 construction is expected to start
11 this fall of this year, 2025.

12 COUNCILMEMBER JONES: So
13 because of time constraints, I cut
14 out all of the thank yous I want to
15 give all of you. Just consider that
16 an asterisk next to it because I do
17 truly appreciate all you've done for
18 my rec centers, even though they're
19 not in South Philly. Thank you.

20 MS. Palantino: Thank you.

21 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
22 Thank you very much.

23 The Chair recognizes
24 Dr. Anthony Phillips.

1 COUNCILMEMBER PHILLIPS:

2 Thank you, Council

3 President. I just want to briefly
4 say thank you to council President
5 for entrusting me with the role of
6 being a chair of parks and rec --
7 recreation. All the members have a
8 briefing that I provided as a result
9 of the work that we've done with
10 Parks and Recreation this year with
11 our committee about some of the
12 great things that are coming from
13 Parks and Recreation, but also some
14 things that we're hoping to make
15 progress towards.

16 When I first started this
17 -- I'm going to go into my questions
18 really quickly. When I first
19 started this, I was adjusting to
20 this role and it took me a little
21 while to understand what to do, but
22 I was -- thanks to the veterans like
23 Councilmember Thomas, Gauthier, and
24 Gilmore-Richardson, I was able to

1 observe what they do as chair people
2 of their committees and try to adopt
3 what we do with this committee. And
4 so I've gotten a little used to it
5 and we made a lot of strides.

6 I want to just begin by
7 thanking Commissioner Slawson, who
8 works really well with our Mayor and
9 also has been a great advocate for
10 our parks and rec system. She's
11 doing a great job, but all of her
12 staff members from Sue Buck to Ann
13 Marie to Frank Fabey and Marissa,
14 thank you-all so much for the work
15 that you're doing. Let's continue
16 to do it.

17 I do want to note that on
18 our tours that I did with our
19 committee members, we noticed a few
20 things that's happening in our -- at
21 our rec centers. One of them
22 includes the need for a welcoming
23 space for our rec centers in terms
24 of lighting in and outside of the

1 spaces. That was noticed by a lot
2 of our staff, parks and rec, and it
3 was a continued thing. As well as
4 most of our rec centers have
5 extensive paving issues that are
6 needed.

7 I just wanted to see if,
8 Commissioner, if you can talk more
9 to the public more about, you know,
10 the need for LED lighting as a
11 welcome space, as well as like, you
12 know, for our staff in and out as
13 well as our paving, as well.

14 MS. SLAWSON: As many of us
15 -- Susan Slawson, as many of us are
16 familiar with our facilities, the
17 age of our facilities are, you know,
18 except for the ones that have been a
19 part of rebuild, they're 50 years
20 and older. And so we're dealing
21 with sites that have lighting issues
22 because of the type of lights,
23 they're not LED. Lights that need
24 to be replaced really often. But

1 we're also lighting systems that are
2 -- they're dim, our facilities are
3 dim. We need to do a better job at
4 upgrading our lighting system, not
5 only inside, but outside as well.

6 And so as we were doing the
7 tours, Council Dr. Phillips has it
8 set up where we go out monthly to
9 tour our sites. And it actually
10 benefited me as well coming back as
11 a new commissioner.

12 And what we were observing
13 is that the lighting inside our
14 facilities for our young people, for
15 our staff, is really not up to par.
16 And I believe we owe it to our young
17 people that are using the
18 facilities, and the staff that are
19 working to do a better job at
20 upgrading the lighting system. But
21 also we notice for paving around our
22 rec centers, there pavement they're
23 crumbling, and it's a challenge.

24 And so we have some of

1 these beautiful sites, where you
2 have rebuild facilities, but the
3 paving around the rec center has not
4 been a part of the scope. And so
5 you walk into a beautiful there --
6 they hit it on there, because the
7 paving around there is complete.
8 But you go to some of the other
9 sites, they're not.

10 And so I'm soliciting just
11 some support, something that we can
12 look into to see if we can address,
13 it's a risk for the city of
14 Philadelphia to have the pavement.
15 We're talking about making sure that
16 we are clean, we're green, we're
17 beautiful, we're safe, it is not
18 safe when you have paving that you
19 have to be concerned about.

20 And so that's some of what
21 we saw. And we did come up with
22 some numbers for lighting inside and
23 out. Paving is something that we
24 would have to look into, but I'm

1 hoping we can work together to
2 figure out how we can address the
3 paving issue at our facilities.

4 COUNCILMEMBER PHILLIPS:

5 And I just want to mention that
6 really quickly and then I'll turn it
7 back over to everyone else. I
8 mentioned this because our ITEF
9 funds would be --

10 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

11 Could you speak into the microphone,
12 please?

13 COUNCILMEMBER PHILLIPS:

14 Oh, I mentioned that because our
15 Councilmember ITEF funds, which is
16 what we do to help, you know, our
17 own rec centers or be completely
18 exhausted, if we try to do paving
19 for our own rec centers. So this is
20 certainly something that I thought
21 about that we should have been
22 having a maintenance strategic plan
23 on every year since the 80s and 90s,
24 and we just haven't done that.

1 So we do a little by little
2 in our budget, we can get to our rec
3 center, so spaces where they need to
4 be. So I'm hoping that we can, you
5 know, change that. And then I just,
6 -- if I just get one quick question
7 in about the -- our seniors sub
8 space.

9 We also observed with our
10 rec centers that we have -- they're
11 open 1:00 to 9:00 p.m., which is,
12 you know, our seniors like to come
13 out early in there. What would need
14 -- what would need to be happening
15 in our programming so that we can be
16 able to maybe make our rec centers
17 more conducive to our seniors?

18 Because we only have a
19 little bit of older adult centers in
20 our district. We don't have in our
21 districts not that many. So, you
22 know, what would need it from a
23 funding mechanism -- what would be
24 needed from a funding mechanism so

1 that we can be able to make our rec
2 centers more friendly for seniors in
3 our morning?

4 MS. SLAWSON: So our senior
5 centers are open from 9:00 until
6 5:00.

7 COUNCILMEMBER PHILLIPS:
8 Right.

9 MS. SLAWSON: Our rec
10 centers for our young people are
11 open from 1:00 until 9:00 during the
12 winter months. Senior's like
13 to go in before it gets too dark.
14 They like to be in the comfort and
15 safety of their homes, but there are
16 always -- there are always
17 opportunities for them to
18 participate after 5:00 in a
19 recreation facility that's close to
20 the -- where they live. And so it's
21 just a matter of us providing
22 programming and having the necessary
23 staff to meet their needs.

24 COUNCILMEMBER PHILLIPS:

1 Thank you. Thank you, Council
2 President. I appreciate it, and
3 look forward to doing work on this
4 committee.

5 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

6 And we do commend you for you-all
7 received a grant regarding autism --

8 COUNCILMEMBER PHILLIPS:

9 Yeah.

10 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

11 -- playground equipment to also
12 address those who may have
13 disabilities. And also are we
14 exploring like playground equipment
15 or -- yeah, playground equipment for
16 singers or the types of things that
17 sing --apparatus that singers like
18 to enjoy?

19 MS. SLAWSON: We are -- we
20 are intentionally trying to create
21 in our system equipment for not only
22 seniors, but for, as you said first,
23 Council President Johnson, autism.
24 I want to say that Councilmember

1 Driscoll is having a universal
2 center playground put up in his
3 district. And it is purposely --
4 it's intentionally for people, young
5 people that have challenges.

6 And so it is our
7 responsibility to make sure that we
8 are meeting everyone's needs, and I
9 believe that. So you all are making
10 it happen. So I commend you all for
11 ensuring that you're holding us to
12 the fire to provide services for
13 everyone, not just for the kids that
14 can jump up and get on something
15 high, but for those kids that are in
16 wheelchairs, those kids that are
17 struggling, we're starting to build
18 our system up to ensure that we're
19 meeting those needs as well.

20 COUNCILMEMBER PHILLIPS: I
21 just wanted to really quickly
22 commend you about the work that
23 we're doing. The reason why we have
24 such a good turnout here is just

1 showing that all of our council
2 members are invested in our
3 libraries and parks and rec. That's
4 not for every committee. And I
5 think that's why we're going to have
6 a lot of questions to support you
7 all. Thank you.

8 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
9 Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The chair
10 recognizes Councilmember Jim
11 Harrity, then Vice Chair Parks and
12 Recreation Center -- park -- Vice
13 Chair Parks and Recreation, Member
14 Cindy Bass, then Member O'Rourke.

15 COUNCILMEMBER HARRITY:
16 Thank you, Council President. How
17 are you? Hello, everybody. How are
18 you today?

19 MS. SLAWSON: Good morning,
20 sir.

21 COUNCILMEMBER HARRITY: I
22 have lots of questions, but I'm
23 going to save my rebuild questions
24 for the second round. And when I

1 asked about our compliance with the
2 HOPS law, what steps has the
3 administration taken to comply with
4 the HOPS law and eliminate toxic
5 synthetic herbicides used in city
6 grounds?

7 And, you know, just for
8 point of reference, are you aware
9 that juries have repeatedly found
10 Bayer Monsanto liable for serious
11 health harms caused by Roundup and
12 other toxic synthetic herbicides on
13 the grounds that the manufacturer
14 annuities projects posed a clear and
15 present danger to human health and
16 failed to warn the public?

17 For example, a 2.25 billion
18 jury award in January 2004, that was
19 later reduced to 400 million and a
20 78 million verdict in October of
21 2024 were both issued in
22 Philadelphia courtrooms. Just trying
23 to figure out, does the city
24 continue non-compliance with the

1 HOPS law exposed not only to the
2 public, but ongoing health risks,
3 but also the city itself to
4 significant legal and financial
5 liabilities?

6 You know, as I said, 2.2
7 billion was just one reward -- award
8 that was granted. And us still
9 continuing to use these products are
10 putting not only our workers, but
11 everybody in our city at harm when
12 they go to a park.

13 This is important to me
14 because I came from the Laborers
15 Union. And my union was, to say the
16 least, highly affected by this.
17 We're the ones that actually spray
18 that stuff on an industrial level,
19 and mostly are things, especially my
20 union Local 57 --

21 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
22 What's the question, Mr. Harrity?

23 COUNCILMEMBER HARRITY: The
24 questions are there. Can you answer

1 what I asked or?

2 MS. BUCK: Good morning.

3 My name is Sue Buck, Deputy
4 Commissioner of Operations.

5 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

6 The Sue Buck. Hey, Sue. How you
7 doing?

8 MS. BUCK: Good morning.

9 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

10 Sue's been around like handling
11 business because she's --

12 MS. BUCK: Our staff
13 receives pesticide training yearly
14 and are trained on proper
15 application of pesticides on public
16 spaces. We do adhere to the HOPS
17 bill. We have --- we keep track of
18 what is sprayed, how much is
19 sprayed, where it's sprayed, and we
20 turn that into the chief clerk
21 yearly, that information. It's also
22 available by a right-to-know request
23 for those who have requested that.
24 So we do adhere to that.

1 We did some pilot testing
2 with other non-herbicide products,
3 and we continue to do that working
4 closely with Penn State and their
5 academics team.

6 COUNCILMEMBER HARRITY: So
7 --

8 MS. BUCK: So we do follow
9 the, you can't spray 50 feet from
10 play equipment, you can't spray in
11 gardens, food producing gardens.

12 COUNCILMEMBER HARRITY: But
13 you're still spraying?

14 MS. BUCK: Well, we do
15 spray as needed, yes. We have staff
16 that is trained, we do spray. I
17 mean --

18 COUNCILMEMBER HARRITY: No.
19 I get that. Our staff were trained
20 too, it didn't stop them from
21 getting cancer. You know, I get it.
22 Things happen though. And the
23 bottom line is this stuff is
24 basically outlawed and we're still

1 using it.

2 And I don't care where

3 you're spraying it, everywhere that

4 you're spraying it is a hazard.

5 It's going to eventually get

6 somewhere. That stuff goes into the

7 ground, gets pushed around by water

8 going through, you know, it's pure

9 physics, you know what I'm saying?

10 And it goes to other places. So no

11 matter where you're spraying it,

12 we're still going to have a problem.

13 And you know, this -- we're not --

14 MS. BUCK: What we were

15 spraying --

16 COUNCILMEMBER HARRITY: --

17 we're talking about a place where

18 kids play, and that's why my concern

19 is that this chemical is still being

20 used. Whether it's not being used

21 near the playground sets or not,

22 kids have a tendency to roam and get

23 into other spaces, so, you know.

24 MS. BUCK: Right. What we

1 were spraying is similar to the
2 products like Roundup that you would
3 use at your home to spray the weeds
4 and the -- at your home. It's not
5 -- we're -- it's -- honestly, it's
6 very labor intensive to remove all
7 the weeds surrounding all the play
8 grounds.

9 COUNCILMEMBER HARRITY: I'm
10 very familiar with it. I'm --

11 MS. BUCK: We are following
12 the guidelines outlined in the HOPS
13 bill the best that we can.

14 COUNCILMEMBER HARRITY:
15 That's right. So to the best that
16 you can, so you're not actually
17 following guidelines.

18 MS. BUCK: Well, we have
19 not --

20 COUNCILMEMBER HARRITY:
21 Because you're still spraying --

22 MS. BUCK: We are following
23 it, we have not --

24 COUNCILMEMBER HARRITY: --

1 those chemicals.

2 MS. BUCK: -- stopped
3 spraying herbicide. We spray it as
4 needed.

5 COUNCILMEMBER HARRITY:
6 Council, I don't get it. How can
7 you being -- you're still spraying
8 and still be in compliance?

9 MS. BUCK: We comply with
10 the HOPS bill. I can say that, yes.
11 And we track everything that's
12 sprayed, where it's sprayed, how
13 much, what is being used?

14 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
15 Can I --

16 COUNCILMEMBER HARRITY: On
17 --

18 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
19 Is there any way we -- is there a
20 reason why we're not using something
21 else as opposed to this particular
22 sprays?

23 COUNCILMEMBER HARRITY:
24 There are organics, that's what I'm

1 getting at.

2 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

3 Can we use, like --

4 MS. BUCK: We have done

5 some testing and the organic

6 material is -- it's not working.

7 It's not -- it's not working. You

8 want to answer that?

9 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

10 So I would ask that you and the

11 chairman of Parks and Rec, and

12 Member Jim Harrity, Chairman of

13 Labor, if we can do a follow-up,

14 because I guess there's a difference

15 between a little harming.

16 I'm just -- for us, there's

17 no difference because harming is

18 harming, and so we are doing

19 everything we can on our -- on our

20 half -- on our behalf as a city to

21 see what all the other alternatives.

22 And I'm sure if you're saying you

23 tried something, it don't work,

24 something has to work somewhere.

1 And if not, I mean this is
2 the norm across the country that
3 this is the way it's done. So I'm
4 sure somewhere else probably don't
5 use this same type of spray product
6 -- pesticide product. Commissioner.

7 MS. SLAWSON: So Council
8 President Johnson and Councilmember
9 Harrity, what we will do if, as you
10 said, if it's possible, if we could
11 have a meeting outside of this
12 conversation and we'll start looking
13 into other alternatives to see how
14 we can venture away from using those
15 things that are harmful.

16 And I will say, we just
17 need to find out what works in other
18 places. It may not happen next
19 week, next month, but we will start
20 doing our due diligence to see how
21 we can make the necessary changes to
22 make sure that all of us are safe.

23 COUNCILMEMBER HARRITY:

24 Yeah, I agree. I'm doing a

1 resolution next week, so it'll be a
2 lot sooner than you think. So we'll
3 get -- we're going to bring in some
4 people and talk about it because
5 this is -- as far as I'm concerned,
6 this is a non-starter.

7 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

8 Thank you, Member Harrity.

9 MS. SLAWSON: Thank you.

10 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

11 Thank you. I think Member Bass, you
12 worked on this issue.

13 COUNCILMEMBER BASS: Yeah,
14 this was my bill.

15 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

16 Vice chair of -- yeah, go ahead.

17 COUNCILMEMBER BASS: Thank
18 you, Mr. President.

19 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

20 A little familiar.

21 COUNCILMEMBER BASS: This
22 was my bill. So --

23 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

24 The floor is yours. You can --

1 COUNCILMEMBER BASS: Yeah.

2 Thank you, sir.

3 So I would like to be
4 included in that conversation as the
5 author of the bill and to, you know,
6 like be as helpful as possible.
7 Because people do get sick. Like
8 people are getting sick from this
9 stuff. And we can't act like it's
10 not happening. So I would very much
11 like to be included and try to find
12 some alternatives.

13 MS. SLAWSON: And we are --
14 we are -- we are -- we are actually
15 grateful, this is what we're
16 supposed to be doing. Making sure
17 that we can find the safest
18 opportunities to ensure that our
19 playgrounds and our parks are safe.
20 So we look forward to this
21 conversation and coming up with
22 alternatives to address it.

23 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

24 And just for the record, now I think

1 about it, how really important it is
2 just to be real. And me and my
3 kids, we were at Chew yesterday. So
4 we are on the field and we're having
5 fun, and we're playing baseball, and
6 they practicing track. I'm going to
7 talk to Councilman Jones about their
8 track stride, but -- and we also at
9 Wharton Square Park. And we're
10 going to play tennis during the
11 summer.

12 And so we're actually in
13 the parks and recreational system
14 enjoying ourselves, but now I guess
15 this is a whole different level
16 because like my own children out
17 there now, and it probably makes it
18 even more intentional in terms of
19 how we need to address this issue in
20 terms of all kids. But my kids
21 actually, I'm not just sitting here
22 as the Council President, but as a
23 dad, we utilize park and
24 recreational spaces with our

1 children. But the floor is yours,
2 Member Bass, and you will be a part
3 of that conversation.

4 COUNCILMEMBER BASS: That'd
5 be great. Thank you, Mr. President.

6 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
7 Councilmember Jones.

8 COUNCILMEMBER JONES: Just
9 for the record, could I be included
10 in that discussion? Seventy percent
11 of the park is in the 4th
12 Councilmatic District, so we have a
13 vested interest in that.

14 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
15 Yes, Member Jones.

16 The Chair recognizes Member
17 Bass.

18 COUNCILMEMBER BASS: Thank
19 you. Oh, he just had to say that,
20 70 percent of the -- he just had to
21 say that.

22 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
23 Well, City Hall -- City Hall is
24 located in the 5th Councilmatic

1 Districts, so.

2 COUNCILMEMBER BASS: We
3 hear you. And we hear you. No, but
4 it's all good. It's all love. So
5 good morning. Good morning.

6 And so I want to thank you
7 actually for being willing to have
8 that conversation, Commissioner. I
9 know that under previous
10 administration and the last
11 administration, it really just felt
12 like it was a shutdown around the
13 conversation. Like, no, we're not
14 going to do it, period. And so I
15 appreciate that you're willing and
16 open because that's a, you know,
17 sort of like a cultural shift.

18 It's a change in the
19 mindset around, you know, protecting
20 our environments and protecting our
21 workers. So I just wanted to say
22 kudos around that matter.

23 Speaking of parks, I just
24 have a few questions probably, I'm

1 going to have to go into a second
2 round. First question, if we could
3 be brief. When I was chair of Parks
4 and Rec, we used to every four years
5 do the authorization around members
6 for the Fairmount Park Commission.
7 And I have not seen that come up.
8 Are we still authorizing?

9 We stopped. The last time
10 we were supposed to do it, it was
11 during COVID. And of course, COVID
12 stopped everything. It was, you
13 know, right at the exact same time
14 and it got pushed to the wait side.
15 So I'm just wondering, do we have a
16 Fairmount Park or a Parks and
17 Recreation commission now? Are we
18 bringing that back? You know, do we
19 need to bring it back? Do we need
20 to dissolve it?

21 I'm just wondering because
22 I know that there were some folks
23 who were really active and engaged
24 and involved and who really wanted

1 to be a part of the system.

2 MS. SLAWSON: Thank you for
3 that question, Councilmember Bass.

4 As a matter of fact, the
5 Mayor has put that on my agenda to
6 make sure we can reconvene. So we
7 are in the process of having that
8 conversation to reconvene the park
9 commission.

10 COUNCILMEMBER BASS:
11 Excellent. And so we'll all be
12 notified so we can -- so as people
13 ask us, we can let them know.

14 MS. SLAWSON: Yes.

15 COUNCILMEMBER BASS: And
16 the other thing I just wanted to say
17 briefly is that you're just so
18 modest that you forgot to mention as
19 the council president was talking
20 about safety in our rec centers what
21 we debuted last night, which is
22 Playing It Safe In The 8th, which is
23 a pilot program, Mr. President,
24 around keeping our playgrounds and

1 recreation centers safe during the
2 summer months.

3 As I had mentioned last
4 night, during the summer, we all get
5 very, very nervous because, you
6 know, young people are gathering,
7 you know, like tempers get hot,
8 people get into arguments, and
9 things start to happen.

10 This is a plan and a
11 program that was piloted by Parks
12 and Recreation under Commissioner
13 Slawson's leadership to make sure
14 that we have boots on the ground,
15 which is specifically pan and having
16 those guys out and about as trusted
17 messengers on site at the -- at the
18 center.

19 So we're going to do four
20 centers in the 8th district, I'm
21 super excited about that. And I
22 just wanted to know if you wanted to
23 add on anything about that, because
24 it's -- this is a game changer, I

1 believe, and once we spread it
2 around the city, it's going to be
3 very impactful.

4 MS. SLAWSON: Thank you for
5 remembering and bringing that up. I
6 think it's important that everyone
7 that's willing to be a part of
8 making sure that our rec centers and
9 our young people are safe. And this
10 is just one of those opportunities
11 that we can use in your district.
12 And like you said, make sure we
13 spread it out, all the support that
14 we can possibly get to help us with
15 our young people and safety.

16 And so I'm looking forward
17 to this, because they're definitely
18 ready, willing, and they're going to
19 make a big difference in the 8th.

20 COUNCILMEMBER BASS:
21 Excellent. Excellent. And I just
22 have one other thing. And if you
23 could answer this briefly. Internet
24 service at our rec centers, we're

1 constantly getting beat up, I'll say
2 by members of our community who have
3 been asking for internet.

4 And, you know, to be able
5 to access WiFi for a very long time
6 at some of our centers, including,
7 I'll just mention Stenton Park,
8 which was built prior to your
9 arrival as commissioner, maybe like
10 four or five years ago, I think it
11 opened up. But we just assumed that
12 it would be ready for WiFi, but it
13 wasn't.

14 And so now we're sort of
15 like starting over, but then I
16 understand a contract was just
17 recently signed with Verizon. Can
18 you give us an update on that to get
19 WiFi in our centers?

20 MS. SLAWSON: So INET is
21 going to be a game changer in our
22 systems because we have been
23 struggling throughout our system,
24 not just young people and adults

1 that want to come into the facility
2 and use it, our staff, they were
3 struggling, but because of this
4 partnership with Verizon and INET is
5 just taking a little longer because
6 some of our buildings, because of
7 the age, we had to also figure out
8 -- we had to find somebody to come
9 in and run the wires.

10 It wasn't as just -- it
11 wasn't as easy as just coming and
12 setting up, we literally had to have
13 wires run throughout the facilities.
14 And so there were 183 facilities, 90
15 percent of those are rec centers.
16 But when this is finished, it's
17 supposed to be 24 -- Marissa, is it
18 a year or 24 months?

19 MS. MARRISA: Twenty-four
20 months.

21 MS. SLAWSON: It supposed
22 to be 24 months total.

23 COUNCILMEMBER BASS: Okay.

24 MS. SLAWSON: So I want to

1 say that, believe it or not, 183
2 facilities, let's say 18 months from
3 now, we'll be able to say all of our
4 facilities have this Verizon INET
5 and make a difference to those
6 locations you're concerned about.

7 COUNCILMEMBER BASS: Super.
8 I'll come back to more of my
9 questions on the next round. But
10 can you give us a list -- can you
11 give park and rec -- give the
12 chairman a list of what has been
13 done, what centers have been done,
14 and what's in order to, you know,
15 come up and, you know, what's
16 happening next in terms of WiFi?
17 Just so that when people ask us, we
18 can answer and give them a good
19 guesstimate as to when WiFi will be
20 coming to their center.

21 MS. SLAWSON: We will
22 provide, Council President, of the
23 list, Councilmember Bass of what's
24 been done, what's going to be done.

1 And hopefully, we can give you an
2 idea when this will be complete as
3 well.

4 COUNCILMEMBER BASS: Thank
5 you.

6 MS. SLAWSON: Thank you.

7 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
8 Thank you. Councilmember O'Rourke,
9 then Councilmember Quetcy Lozada,
10 then Councilman Squilla.

11 COUNCILMEMBER O'ROURKE:
12 Thank you, Mr. President. This has
13 been quite the exchange this morning
14 already. Good morning to you,
15 Director Richards, as well as
16 Commissioner Slawson.

17 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
18 Member O'Rourke, could you speak
19 into the microphone, please?

20 COUNCILMEMBER O'ROURKE:
21 Oh, very rarely am I told that I'm
22 too quiet. Thank you very much.

23 Good morning to you. I'm
24 going to try to get my questions

1 out. A lot of that has kind of been
2 touched on in bits and pieces
3 through the exchanges that have
4 probably already taken place, but
5 there are some nuances that I want
6 to try to raise out of them. And
7 I'll start with you Director
8 Richards.

9 The -- as leader Brooks
10 mentioned in her point of
11 information at the top, the
12 library's proposed budget includes
13 funding for over a thousand
14 positions. And we also know that
15 many of those remain unfilled, that
16 hiring is slow and attrition is
17 actually outpacing recruitment.

18 We're also hearing directly
19 from workers that there's a serious
20 retention crisis, that workers are
21 actually demoting themselves rather
22 than seeking promotion because of
23 inadequate support being asked to do
24 too much with too little.

1 Supervisors are overseeing
2 dozens of employees, entire
3 facilities without compensation, or
4 resources to match. What's the
5 administration doing to both
6 accelerate hiring and create
7 conditions that retain and support
8 the staff who actually keep our
9 libraries running and actually want
10 to advance in those leadership
11 positions.

12 MR. RICHARDS: Thank you,
13 Councilman. The more people we hire
14 alleviates stress on management for
15 our team. So if we are able to fill
16 more of these positions, it'll
17 alleviate some of that. Again,
18 it'll alleviate some of that stress
19 for the workload that staff have
20 been carrying on for a long time.

21 So I believe as we bring
22 more people on board, they'll have
23 more support to provide the
24 necessary programming that, you

1 know, our staff are engaging in in
2 all of our neighborhoods.

3 COUNCILMEMBER O'ROURKE:

4 Thank you, sir. I also strongly,
5 strongly, strongly support the
6 scaling up services as the Free
7 Library of Philadelphia plays a
8 vital role in providing access to
9 literacy, to learning, workforce
10 development, opportunities for all
11 residents.

12 We have heard from workers
13 that basic supplies are sometimes
14 being purchased out-of-pocket. I
15 think this was mentioned by the
16 president at the top of the
17 questions here, particularly due to
18 issues with purchasing -- with the
19 purchasing system itself, and that
20 branches are regularly closing
21 because of the HVAC failures that
22 could be prevented.

23 What steps can we take to
24 ensure that this expansion is built

1 on a solid foundation where
2 infrastructure is functioning
3 properly and where our front line
4 workers are properly equipped to
5 carry out this critical mission?

6 More specifically, would it
7 be possible to receive a map of the
8 libraries that are -- or the rec
9 centers that are currently at risk
10 due to these infrastructure
11 challenges?

12 Like, if we could have like
13 a list of them, a map of them and
14 kind of know specifically where they
15 are.

16 MR. RICHARDS: Just to make
17 sure I can -- I understand your
18 question. You're looking for a map
19 of libraries that have a building or
20 --

21 COUNCILMEMBER O'ROURKE: I
22 believe there was a memo that was
23 sent out in the line of -- be while
24 this was going on, that I think the

1 libraries are actually are straight
2 on the HVAC issue. So if it's not
3 libraries, then so be it. But it is
4 a question, I guess, for both
5 libraries as well as parks and rec.
6 If we could get like a map of the
7 sites that actually have these
8 issues with the HVAC, that would be,
9 I think, particularly helpful.

10 MR. RICHARDS: Okay.

11 COUNCILMEMBER O'ROURKE:

12 Okay. I have some other
13 questions, but I'll wait for my
14 second round. Thank you,
15 Mr. President. Okay. Let me shoot
16 to this in here.

17 Since 2019, Commissioner
18 Slawson, there have been more than,
19 and again, the president looked this
20 up already, 300 shootings at our
21 near -- at our near parks and rec
22 centers. And as you spoke to,
23 workers are actually reporting being
24 placed in unsafe conditions, without

1 sufficient backup.

2 Now, public safety takes
3 varied forms, and I believe it is
4 essential to focus on approaches
5 that further meet communities'
6 needs, such as having social workers
7 and municipal guards on site. These
8 are DC 33 jobs, these are DC 47 jobs
9 that are just waiting. We see other
10 departments, like the Free Library
11 have these resources.

12 Similar to what I said to
13 President Johnson's question, what's
14 the department's comprehensive
15 strategy for public safety at
16 recreation centers? These
17 particular workers, like the
18 municipal guards in particular,
19 social workers, these roles and
20 approaches are specifically well
21 suited to supporting well-being and
22 fostering positive relationships,
23 particularly at high need, youth
24 serving sites like parks and recs.

1 And more specifically, how might we
2 work together to expand the
3 presence, again, of municipal guards
4 and of social workers to create not
5 just safety that we can see, but
6 also that we can feel, that we can
7 kind of cultivate in those spaces?

8 MS. SLAWSON: Thank you for
9 the question, Councilmember
10 O'Rourke. As far as the shootings
11 and the public safety questions,
12 Commissioner Bethel laid out some
13 amazing statistics of what has
14 happened since 2019 up until now,
15 and how the numbers have decreased.

16 And he also talked about
17 how it's 3.6 percent of his total
18 crime that happens around recreation
19 facilities. I probably can't
20 address that any better than he did,
21 honestly.

22 But as far as the municipal
23 guards and the social workers that
24 you're talking about, I think that's

1 a conversation that we would have to
2 sit down and have a conversation
3 about to come up with some type of a
4 plan for staffing, how much staff, a
5 pilot program. It's not something I
6 could honestly sit here and say,
7 this is how this could work.

8 I can tell you that we
9 currently have trauma informed
10 programs in six of our sites right
11 now, because we recognize how
12 difficult it is for some of our
13 young people and even our adults to
14 deal with some of the issues that
15 are going on in the communities.

16 COUNCILMEMBER O'ROURKE: A
17 thousand percent. I think some of
18 that was -- some of Councilwoman
19 Gauthier's work, I believe. I know
20 some of those were in West Philly,
21 and that's some -- that's exactly
22 what I'm talking about. Having a
23 more robust understanding of what
24 providing care as well as protection

1 is at our rec centers.

2 And to the President's
3 point, you know, again, a freshman
4 year and a couple months in, but I
5 think we will all agree that we
6 would spare no expense on making
7 sure that we can provide those sorts
8 of protections. And I do think
9 municipal -- there's private --
10 public-private partnerships, and
11 there's also literally DC33, DC47
12 workers whose jobs are -- it is to
13 be social workers, to be municipal
14 guards. And leveraging that I think
15 would only make our safety
16 infrastructure at parks and rec that
17 much better.

18 So I would love to be a
19 part of that conversation if that
20 would be okay. But I've already
21 been on the man's mic too long.
22 Thank you so much.

23 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

24 Well, thank you, Member O'Rourke.

1 The Chair recognizes
2 Councilman Quetcy Lozada, then
3 Chairman of Appropriations, Mark
4 Squilla.

5 COUNCILMEMBER LOZADA:

6 Thank you, Council President.

7 Thank you for being with us
8 this morning. I'll start really
9 quick with the free library.
10 Libraries are -- or should be
11 community hubs in our neighborhoods.
12 I have a question about the
13 Frankford Library, beautiful brand
14 new building, never opened. And so
15 I'm just trying to figure out why?
16 Are we missing -- are we crossing?

17 My staff has been there
18 multiple times. We've called and
19 left messages to try to figure out
20 how we connect residents with the
21 programming in that space, and we
22 can't ever get anyone there.

23 And so I was just wondering
24 whether it is open, it's not open.

1 How do we connect? What's the best
2 way?

3 MR. RICHARDS: Okay.
4 Sorry. Sorry, Councilwoman. Good
5 question. I just wanted to make
6 sure I get the correct day. The
7 second week in May is when the
8 Frankford Library will be open.

9 COUNCILMEMBER LOZADA: What
10 was that?

11 MR. RICHARDS: Second week
12 in May.

13 COUNCILMEMBER LOZADA: The
14 second week in May?

15 MR. RICHARDS: Yes.

16 COUNCILMEMBER LOZADA: It
17 will be open?

18 MR. RICHARDS: Yes.

19 COUNCILMEMBER LOZADA:
20 Thank you for that.

21 MR. RICHARDS: You're
22 welcome.

23 COUNCILMEMBER LOZADA: And
24 then that was my only question for

1 the library, because in my other
2 libraries they're operating, they --
3 they're doing what they need to do
4 for communities.

5 And so I'm grateful for the
6 partnership that we've been able to
7 have with my office, so thank you
8 for that. Commissioner Slawson, I
9 also want to thank you for the walk-
10 throughs that we've been able to do
11 in the different centers of my
12 district. I think that we're on the
13 same page that just because we don't
14 have new spaces, that doesn't mean
15 that they can't be clean spaces.

16 And so I'm a stickler for
17 cleaning. I want to put on the
18 record that the person that you have
19 at our Ferko Recreation Center
20 should be given a raise because he
21 does an amazing job at making sure
22 that not just that rec center is
23 clean, but that that entire park
24 space is clean, as well as ensuring

1 that the fields are clean, that the
2 sidewalks are clean, and that
3 Piccoli is also clean, and I don't
4 think that that's fair.

5 While I'm extremely
6 grateful to him, and all that he
7 does in our community, I think that
8 expecting one person to maintain two
9 very heavily used spaces is just not
10 acceptable. And the response that
11 we got from some of the members of
12 your team is that there's a part-
13 time person at Piccoli. And so as
14 we look to do more in Piccoli, as we
15 look to renovate Piccoli, is there
16 an opportunity to find someone
17 that's going to be able to maintain
18 this space at Piccoli, or the area
19 at Piccoli. Because, you know, it
20 doesn't make sense to invest so much
21 money and then not be able to
22 sustain what we are investing in.

23 MS. SLAWSON: Thank you for
24 that question, Councilman Lozada.

1 And yes, we will have additional
2 support at Piccoli, and not split
3 the time for the gentleman that is
4 actually covering Ferko, which is a
5 huge facility, which has its own
6 challenges. He should have support
7 and he should not be at both sites.

8 So we'll manage that and
9 we'll make sure that there's a
10 specific person assigned to Piccoli.

11 COUNCILMEMBER LOZADA: And
12 speaking of sustaining, right, we're
13 investing a lot of money in all of
14 these rebuild projects. Are we --
15 do we have a system in place that
16 will allow us to see these
17 investments taken care of for years
18 to come?

19 MS. SLAWSON: So we don't
20 currently have a system in place,
21 Councilmember Lozada, but I am
22 working on getting an asset
23 management system in place. Because
24 what happens, if we don't, and I'll

1 use Rivera, and I'll use Vare for
2 instance. If we don't have an asset
3 management system in place, 20 years
4 from now, the challenges that we see
5 at some of these facilities we will
6 see at those sites.

7 And the goal is to plan out
8 to know when the air conditioner is
9 supposed to be replaced without it
10 dying, to know when the floors need
11 to be redone, to know when it needs
12 to be painted again. And we don't
13 have -- we have Proformo, which is
14 very limited. So I'm working on a
15 plan. We've actually had some of
16 our team put together a proposal to
17 come up with an asset management.
18 It really is about looking past next
19 week, next month, next year.

20 If we want to keep our
21 system up, clean, and green, and
22 safe, we have to do the planning
23 now. And so once we get this asset
24 management system, we'll be able to

1 identify what needs to be done in
2 our sites prior to, and not waiting
3 until the facility again looks like
4 it's 20 years old. That defeats the
5 purpose of creating and building all
6 these new facilities.

7 So we are working on a plan
8 and we actually have the proposal.
9 So we will have an asset management
10 system in place at some point
11 because we recognize the need.

12 COUNCILMEMBER LOZADA:

13 Thank you. And will that include
14 things like preparing for the
15 openings of our pool spaces? We
16 have a ton of pools, summer comes
17 every year, right. And so my --
18 some of the frustrations that I
19 experience is that we're not
20 prepared because we need tanks, we
21 need something. Are we -- is that
22 management system going to include
23 those kinds of things?

24 And more importantly, are

1 our pools all going to be ready for
2 opening at the beginning of the
3 season?

4 MS. SLAWSON: That system,
5 asset -- that asset management
6 system will include everything in
7 our system that we need to maintain
8 and be on top of. It is about
9 maintenance for these sites.

10 And the answer to your
11 question, we will have 63 of our
12 pools open. The other pools are
13 under some type of a construction or
14 a part of Rebuild, which would be
15 our seven additional pools. But 63
16 will be open this summer.

17 COUNCILMEMBER LOZADA:
18 Thank you. Do we have time for one
19 more? No? Okay. Thank you.

20 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
21 Real brief, please.

22 COUNCILMEMBER LOZADA:
23 Okay.

24 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

1 I do have a -- well, be brief, I
2 want my members to answer. I'll ask
3 mine in the second round. But as a
4 matter of equity, I know in Quetcy's
5 district, right, when you ride
6 through Hunting Park, they have the
7 swimming pool with all the nice,
8 like, art stuff, that's swimming
9 pool stuff on the gates is very,
10 very colorful.

11 I think all the
12 playgrounds, swimming pools should
13 have it. Because that's very, very,
14 very, very nice. And it, very,
15 very, she-she. I asked Tumar about
16 it last year, he said like some type
17 of partnership. You know what I'm
18 talking about?

19 MS. SLAWSON: I do. It's
20 called Swim Philly.

21 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
22 Yes.

23 MS. SLAWSON: And they did
24 -- they identified certain pools

1 where they were -- it's actually
2 gorgeous. And you know what, every
3 pool should have it. I'm going to
4 do with you --

5 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
6 Whatever we need to do budget-wise
7 to support because it felt very,
8 very, she-she, when I was up there.
9 Like, okay, this is nice. So we are
10 putting in that as official request
11 for support.

12 MS. SLAWSON: We can
13 provide you with that information.

14 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
15 Equity would be across the city of
16 Philadelphia.

17 The Chair recognizes
18 Councilmember and Chairman of
19 Appropriations Mark Squilla. Then
20 we'll have Councilmember Majority
21 Leader Katherine Gilmore-Richardson,
22 and then we'll have Jeffrey J.
23 Young, and then Jamie Gauthier.

24 COUNCILMEMBER SQUILLA:

1 Thank you, Council president. Thank
2 you, guys, for being here. And you
3 know, we're all big advocates for
4 both the libraries and our parks.

5 And thank you,
6 Mr. Richards, for your responses to
7 our many emails and concerns. I
8 know somebody had asked earlier and
9 you had mentioned, I think it was
10 Council President and they asked
11 about the resources needed for our
12 HVAC systems and while some of our
13 libraries have been closed, do you
14 think that the current budget ask
15 will allow us to repair the current
16 ones?

17 But also, I know you were
18 saying you were putting a list
19 together of capital improvements
20 necessary to replace a lot of the
21 old HVAC systems throughout the
22 libraries. Is that something that
23 would be in a future ask, or will
24 that be asked in this budget, or how

1 would that work?

2 MR. RICHARDS: Well, the
3 great thing about this budget is
4 we've got a -- the buildings
5 conditioning assessment. What
6 that'll do is give us the
7 opportunity to find out what our
8 true needs are rather than going
9 after each emergency that takes
10 place.

11 So this will give us, and
12 it ties in even to our strategic
13 plan. It -- this gives us a
14 strategic plan for our buildings,
15 and we can prioritize what needs to
16 be done. But in the interim, we're
17 -- in the interim is what's based in
18 our budget now, is what we know of
19 now and what we can work on to get
20 fixed.

21 But the assessment is going
22 to give us the true data that we
23 need to be able to present to you
24 what our overall needs are for the

1 whole system, and it's something
2 we've never had before.

3 COUNCILMEMBER SQUILLA: So
4 no longer just, this money is just
5 the patch things, keep them working
6 as long as possible --

7 MR. RICHARDS: Correct.

8 COUNCILMEMBER SQUILLA: --
9 so they can be replaced?

10 MR. RICHARDS: Correct.

11 COUNCILMEMBER SQUILLA: And
12 then the assessment will tell us
13 what that total cost is and what is
14 needed. And it --

15 MR. RICHARDS: It will tell
16 us what our -- what our major needs
17 are going forward. Because again,
18 like I said earlier, some of these
19 systems date back to the 60s.

20 COUNCILMEMBER SQUILLA: All
21 right. Well, thank you. I want to
22 continue to work on that and
23 hopefully provide work with Council
24 and administration on providing

1 enough resources necessary to make
2 sure that not only open -- every
3 library is open six days, but
4 hopefully getting into seven days
5 with the not being closed because of
6 either staffing or because of HVAC
7 concerns.

8 MR. RICHARDS: Yes.

9 COUNCILMEMBER SQUILLA: And
10 I think that's the goal of everybody
11 here. Parks and Rec, Commissioner
12 Slawson, thank you so much for all
13 your advocacy and work and your
14 team, they're always very
15 responsive. This is something we've
16 been asking every year and it's
17 usually of the removal of dead trees
18 and getting rid of some of the
19 diseased or dangerous trees so we
20 could replant in those locations.

21 Do we have money -- enough
22 money in our budget or we need to
23 add money into our budget to make
24 sure that we -- I know there was a

1 new assessment done. I guess you
2 could ask Sue or -- to see if we
3 have enough resources to be able to
4 address the removal and -- of the
5 dead trees. Hi.

6 MS. FICHMAN: Hello. I'm
7 Erica Smith Fichman. I'm the city
8 forester. I'm happy to answer that
9 question. So we -- last year with
10 the \$500 -- \$500,000 increase in
11 tree maintenance money, we were able
12 to prune 2,700 trees. So that's
13 more than twice what we are able to
14 do in the two years prior.

15 And we have been able to
16 eliminate with the money we are
17 spending on tree -- on street tree
18 removals this year, we will be able
19 to eliminate all of the dead and
20 hazardous trees that are on our
21 list. That's what we know of. Of
22 course, trees are being added to
23 that list every day. The existing
24 backlog of trees to be removed is

1 around 3000 across the city, and
2 that's about \$2.6 million.

3 COUNCILMEMBER SQUILLA: So
4 you would need additional \$2.6
5 million in this year's budget to --
6 would you have the capacity to do
7 that in a year?

8 MS. FICHMAN: It will be --
9 it would have to be a phased thing
10 to work up to that, yes. But we
11 have a certain amount of money in
12 the budget -- well, we hope to have
13 a certain amount of money in the
14 budget to tackle a bunch of those in
15 FY26 --

16 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
17 Excuse me, I have a point of
18 information. Dr. Phillips.

19 COUNCILMEMBER PHILLIPS:
20 Yes, thank you. Just a point of
21 information. What -- he just said
22 that three is -- you said 3,000
23 backlog or trees --

24 MS. FICHMAN: Yes.

1 COUNCILMEMBER PHILLIPS: --
2 that would need to be pruned. But
3 what would be needed to actually get
4 that done? When you said \$2.6
5 million, but in terms of staffing,
6 what would be needed? Because I
7 know it's hard to find arborists to
8 do it, so are you -- are we coming
9 up with a plan to make that happen?
10 That's all.

11 I just want to see what can
12 -- what's the timeline? Because the
13 residents want a timeline and how
14 can we make that as a priority?

15 MS. FICHMAN: Yeah. So in
16 terms of staffing, we do have a new
17 inspector coming on in June and we
18 have a couple of vacancies that we
19 are actively filling to increase our
20 inspector capacity. Because every
21 one of those trees needs to be
22 inspected to determine the
23 condition, what the priority is on
24 the list for removal.

1 So we, you know, we do have
2 our staffing plan that we are
3 working towards, we also have
4 existing contractors that can take
5 on additional work over time.

6 We need large amounts of
7 time -- of money over time to
8 increase capacity up to being able
9 to do 3,000 trees in the single
10 year. We've never done something
11 quite that big before. So as we
12 receive more money over time, we can
13 increase our yearly production on
14 tree removals.

15 COUNCILMEMBER SQUILLA:

16 Thank you.

17 MS. FICHMAN: Yes.

18 COUNCILMEMBER SQUILLA:

19 That's it, yeah.

20 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

21 Member Squilla.

22 COUNCILMEMBER SQUILLA:

23 Thank you. And it's great because

24 it's -- you guys have been very

1 responseful -- very responsive to
2 our inquiries one off. But, I mean,
3 it was great to have that full plan
4 together and I guess an amount that
5 we could work on the Council with
6 the administration to see what is
7 necessary to do that, because I do
8 believe by removing the dead ones,
9 we could even plant more trees in
10 those areas.

11 MS. FICHMAN: Absolutely.

12 COUNCILMEMBER SQUILLA: And
13 instead of reducing our canopy,
14 growing our canopy, which I think is
15 the goal, and I really -- one other
16 thing I want to say is the
17 appreciation of the maintenance of
18 the trees, the tree trimming that
19 has been done has been greatly
20 appreciated, because that also adds
21 to some of the damage when we have
22 these windstorms and other things
23 that these big branches end up
24 coming off and end up having to

1 remove a whole tree when if we have
2 could have maintained them, we
3 wouldn't have to do that in the
4 future.

5 So thank you all for your
6 great response and I'm looking
7 forward to continue working with you
8 on this. I appreciate it.

9 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

10 And I just want to just follow-up
11 briefly, and that's a matter of
12 public safety. Now, I just called
13 Frank Fabey the other day that
14 assist me because Cobbs Creek
15 Parkway, 63rd of Whitby Avenue, I
16 think it's either me or Jamie's
17 district but it's along the same
18 area. We're adjacent to one
19 another. I had to call them because
20 it was posted that this huge tree
21 branch came down and it totally
22 blocked the whole street, right?
23 And it went viral.

24 And I called Frank Fabey, I

1 called Keith Warren, and Keith
2 Warren said this is under Parks and
3 Recreation. But the debris was able
4 to be removed, but as a matter of
5 public safety, if somebody wasn't
6 paying attention, they would've ran
7 into that debris and, you know,
8 could have started a fatality on
9 Cobbs Creek Parkway.

10 So whatever we need to do
11 in 2.5 million, 6 million out of \$8
12 billion is nothing. It's just do we
13 have the capacity to staff up and
14 make it a priority to get it done in
15 a very, very timely fashion. So
16 whatever we can do as a ally, we
17 want to make sure we get it done.

18 The Chair recognizes
19 Councilwoman Katherine Gilmore-
20 Richardson, then Councilmember
21 Jeffrey Jr. Young, Gauthier, then
22 Dr. Nina Ahmad.

23 COUNCILMEMBER GILMORE-
24 RICHARDSON: Thank you. Thank you

1 very much, Council President, and
2 thank each of you for being here and
3 for your work. I'm going to quickly
4 start off with my thank yous and
5 then go into just a couple questions
6 I have, primarily on capital side
7 for the libraries. But I have to
8 reiterate for Parks and Rec that I
9 second the information and question
10 shared by Councilmember Curtis
11 Jones, Jr., who is also my district
12 Councilmember regarding my concern
13 around the John C. Anderson Cultural
14 Center.

15 For the record, we have no
16 recreation center or cultural center
17 in Wynnefield at all. We have
18 nothing for our young people. So,
19 even at the town hall we had the
20 other evening, someone approached
21 Councilman Jones and I regarding the
22 John C. Anderson Cultural Center.
23 So I just want to underscore what he
24 stated that we really want to get

1 the John C. Anderson Cultural Center
2 up and running. It also serves as
3 one of our polling places in the
4 52nd Ward.

5 So thank you very much to
6 the Free Library of Philadelphia for
7 accommodating an additional polling
8 place request due to the library --
9 due to the cultural center being
10 closed.

11 But thank you very much to
12 Kelly Richards, Christina Patton,
13 Chris Caputo, Felina Hand, who's a
14 Girl's High girl. And over at the
15 Wynnefield Library specifically,
16 branch manager, Susan Ben, Ms. Mary
17 and Ms. Ethel. We appreciate all of
18 those team members from the Free
19 Library of Philadelphia.

20 And from Parks and Rec, of
21 course, our commissioner who is
22 always responsive, Susan Slawson, we
23 thank you very much for your
24 commitment to the city of

1 Philadelphia. Sue Buck, we don't
2 get to see you a lot but we see you
3 via e-mail. You are just always so
4 helpful with all of our constituent
5 cases, particularly the ones
6 regarding tree maintenance. So,
7 thank you very much and Beth says
8 thank you.

9 And then I saw Chris
10 Creelman, thank you for the Rebuild
11 updates and for your service to the
12 city even back to your,
13 Councilmember Krajewski days. But
14 really quickly for the Free Library,
15 I know Council President talked
16 about the capital request. And as
17 my colleague Councilmember O'Rourke
18 stated, we did receive information
19 during the hearing regarding the
20 capital request.

21 I know that I asked in
22 advance of the administration team.
23 I don't know if Sabrina or Rob are
24 here to respond to this question,

1 but I asked for a breakdown of all
2 of the proposed capital investments,
3 specifically for the Free Library of
4 Philadelphia prior to this budget
5 hearing.

6 I wanted to have the
7 information today so that we could
8 have a more full and robust
9 conversation that asked, was made of
10 the administration's budget and
11 finance team and the proposal, so
12 you know that we received it stated,
13 I think Andorra and Haverford for
14 major capital investment, which is
15 up in the 4th, in different parts of
16 the 4th. And it said various
17 projects. And so it doesn't list
18 what those various projects are,
19 what they're targeting and how much
20 the spend would be.

21 So even the information
22 that we just received, it's a total
23 amount of dollars. So it does not
24 help us as members, and particularly

1 for my district colleagues identify
2 where the investments will take
3 place. So, I want to put that on
4 the record because it's important to
5 us that during this process we're
6 able to ensure that we are dealing
7 with any and all capital issues as
8 it relates to the Free Library of
9 Philadelphia.

10 And in addition to that, I
11 was going through the detail, but if
12 you could talk about the LEAP
13 program, you know, that program is
14 important and as we continue to want
15 to provide additional space and
16 opportunities for our young people,
17 if you could talk about if the LEAP
18 program will be fully operational
19 this year and how many TLAs, Team
20 Leadership Assistants will be able
21 to hire throughout the system.

22 MR. RICHARDS: You're
23 ready?

24 COUNCILMEMBER GILMORE -

1 RICHARDSON: Yes.

2 MR. RICHARDS: Okay. Thank
3 you, Councilwoman and we really
4 appreciate all that you do for the
5 Free Library of Philadelphia and the
6 obvious love that you have for it.
7 Our Literacy Enrichment After-School
8 Program, that program we're fully --
9 going to be fully funded for that.

10 And our TLAs, I don't have
11 an exact number. I think I'll have
12 to get back with you with our team
13 library assistance on how many we'll
14 have on. But that -- do we have
15 that number? 100? Okay. Awesome.
16 Okay. I forgot I brought a team
17 with me. We have -- we're going to
18 have 100 of those.

19 And that particular program
20 for those who don't know, is an
21 opportunity for teens to come in the
22 library and work, and learn job
23 skills, and propel them forward to
24 be like a Mayor, councilwoman. And

1 we've had some who've come back who
2 work for some of -- some of our
3 council. They learn these skills
4 and they provide homework help for
5 our youth throughout the city. So
6 it's a great opportunity to learn
7 job skills. And it's a great
8 opportunity to provide homework help
9 and support for young people
10 throughout the city.

11 I mean, it is a program
12 that is 360 degree benefit of
13 providing support and help for other
14 young people and for young people to
15 actually get job skills in a
16 educational environment working with
17 our premier staff and picking up
18 skill sets for them. And Literacy
19 Enrichment After-School Program is
20 program -- I mean, help and support
21 for young people again throughout
22 the city --

23 COUNCILMEMBER GILMORE -

24 RICHARDSON: Can we, Director

1 Richards, because I heard the bell
2 and I want to honor the clock.
3 Could you all just send to us the
4 recruitment information --

5 MR. RICHARDS: Okay.

6 COUNCILMEMBER GILMORE-

7 RICHARDSON: -- for the team
8 leadership assistant positions,
9 because that's another way to
10 support young people in the
11 summertime, and how they interact
12 and interface with the Free Library
13 System. And then I have to put on
14 the record particularly for the
15 autism program, that I think is
16 stellar that was started at
17 Wynnefield Library that you all are
18 expanding. If you could just give
19 us a response in writing regarding
20 how that program will expand across
21 the Free Library System.

22 And then finally, I wanted
23 to just mention this for Parks and
24 Rec. One, the trees, we are getting

1 so many requests for down trees and
2 I heard Council President talk about
3 this and other colleagues. I think
4 it would be helpful if we get
5 something that just says, like, what
6 the parameters are, because, you
7 know, some of the trees that we get,
8 and I know Sue knows this, it's
9 technically on the property line for
10 the homeowner.

11 And so, as far as the
12 discretion that's utilized to
13 determine, you know, when a tree is
14 a -- when it's appropriate for us as
15 Council to alert you all to a down a
16 tree and then when it's technically
17 the property owner's responsibility.
18 We have a lot of cases like that.

19 So if we could just get
20 some education there, that would be
21 exceedingly helpful. And then I
22 just have to put one last thing in
23 for the Dell. The Dell, The Dell
24 and The Dell. Thank you.

1 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

2 Thank you. The Chair recognizes
3 Councilmember Jeffrey J. Young,
4 Councilmember Jamie Gauthier, then
5 Dr. Nina Ahmad, then Councilmember
6 Kendra Brooks. And then we'll be
7 officially in our second round.

8 COUNCILMEMBER YOUNG: Thank
9 you, Mr. President. I just want to
10 echo the thank yous as well to the
11 staff at Parks and Rec, Capital
12 Projects and to the library. I know
13 I'm annoying, so, you know, we are
14 -- but it's just because I care too
15 much -- too much that someone would
16 say about these particular issues.

17 I want more, right? I ask
18 for more. I demand more. And so
19 our children deserve to have more.
20 They should -- they deserve to have
21 the best and I'm not going to hide
22 from that, right? I'm not going to
23 hide from the fact that I want the
24 best for our kids in our city and in

1 my -- and in my district.

2 I serve some of the most
3 vulnerable kids throughout the city.
4 But particularly for the libraries.
5 So libraries today are not the same
6 as libraries in the past, right?

7 When -- and when there's a need in
8 the community, libraries have often
9 filled that void and evolved with
10 the times to step up to fill those
11 needs for the community.

12 So can you tell us about
13 what ideas or plans or if any of our
14 current spaces, any of our current
15 library spaces offer, you know, have
16 maker spaces, have pod casting
17 studios, have video editing spaces,
18 have gaming spaces, right? So to
19 attract current teenagers, right,
20 not teenagers of the past, but
21 current teenagers to come to utilize
22 these spaces.

23 MR. RICHARDS: Thank you,
24 Councilman. Good question. Our

1 focus has been to make sure to get
2 these libraries open for the
3 community. That's been the -- been
4 the preeminent issue that we've been
5 focused in on lately. We have a
6 very creative, talented staff who
7 provide programming opportunities
8 throughout our system.

9 We do anywhere from 25,000
10 to 30,000 programs a year and serves
11 over 600,000 people. And within
12 those programming efforts are STEM
13 and STEAM activities, beekeeping,
14 coding, we've -- gaming, you know,
15 the -- you know, I'm outgrown, some
16 of the Xbox and all that stuff.
17 But, you know, we've had those,
18 chess.

19 I mean there's so -- we're
20 so varied in the programming
21 opportunities, STEM, STEAM programs
22 that we provide the community, and
23 there's a demand on it. And as we
24 staff up, we'll be able to do even

1 more. So we do quite a bit. We
2 work hard to provide the same
3 opportunities that you're saying for
4 this city. And we're looking to do
5 much more.

6 We're going through a
7 strategic planning process where
8 we'll be receiving input from our
9 young people, talking to them to
10 find out what more do they want. So
11 our goal is literally to be on the
12 cutting edge of providing library
13 services. And as you said, you
14 know, libraries, you know, they're
15 not what they used to be, you know,
16 we are third space, we're community
17 location where people come for a
18 variety of different services and
19 needs.

20 COUNCILMEMBER YOUNG: But
21 what can you do if these teens,
22 right, the patrons of the library
23 say they want certain programs, but
24 there just isn't enough physical

1 space in our libraries to provide
2 those opportunities to our citizens?

3 MR. RICHARDS: We have to
4 be creative. You know, some events,
5 even at our central library, we have
6 outside because they're large. I
7 mean, we could probably do some
8 inside, but I mean, it -- we just
9 have to be -- we have to be creative
10 and I'm talking to you based on what
11 we have now. We have to be
12 creative. Our staff is creative and
13 utilizing, you know, the space that
14 we have.

15 COUNCILMEMBER YOUNG: Thank
16 you. And I heard the bell. I'll
17 come back for another round,
18 Mr. President. Thank you.

19 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
20 Thank you. Councilmember
21 Jamie Gauthier, Councilmember
22 Dr. Nina Ahmad, then Councilmember
23 Brooks, then we'll officially be in
24 our second round.

1 COUNCILMEMBER GAUTHIER:

2 Thank you, Council President.

3 Good morning to both of
4 you. Thank you for all that you do
5 for our city. It's been a pleasure
6 working with both of you and your
7 teams. I wanted to reiterate the
8 Majority Leader's request that we
9 can receive information -- and,
10 sorry, this is for Director
11 Richards, that we can receive
12 information on which specific
13 library branches are slated for
14 significant renovations or capital
15 improvements in FY26.

16 Additionally, would you be
17 able to provide my office with an
18 update on the current operational
19 status of library branches, and for
20 the Commissioner, recreation centers
21 within the third district detailing
22 which locations are fully
23 operational, under renovation,
24 operating with limited hours or

1 awaiting future upgrades. And then
2 my questions.

3 First, for Director
4 Richards, I wanted you to outline
5 with respect to the capital
6 improvements that you aim to make in
7 FY26, what is the criteria for how
8 you will prioritize those projects
9 and make sure that there is
10 equitable distribution across
11 neighborhoods? And then also, can
12 you give us a timeline for that sort
13 of physical assessment that you
14 mentioned as well as your strategic
15 planning effort.

16 And then for Commissioner
17 Slawson, I'm really worried about,
18 you know, our future beyond Rebuild.
19 Rebuild has been amazing and I'm so
20 glad that so many projects in my
21 district and across the city have
22 been renovated. But if we're being
23 honest, there was a lot of deferred
24 maintenance, and I'm scared that

1 we'll get to the same place again.

2 So I wanted to ask you, in
3 terms of the FY26 budget, it -- what
4 are we doing to account for
5 maintenance from a financial
6 perspective? Is there an increase
7 for everyday needs, everyday capital
8 needs for example?

9 And then secondly for
10 Commissioner Slawson, in the past we
11 found that the reason that Parks and
12 Recreation has had difficulty
13 filling park positions is because
14 many of them are seasonal and, you
15 know, don't offer opportunities
16 year-round nor is there a reliable
17 path to full-time employment for
18 seasonal workers. So can you speak
19 to what Parks and Rec is doing to
20 address that barrier? And I know
21 that was a lot, so I'm happy to
22 repeat questions if need be.

23 MS. SLAWSON: Councilmember
24 Gauthier, we're going to answer your

1 last question first and then I'll
2 come back.

3 COUNCILMEMBER GAUTHIER:

4 Thank you.

5 MS. WASHINGTON: Good
6 morning. First Deputy Commissioner
7 Marissa Washington. To answer your
8 question about pathways for our
9 seasonals, one of the things that we
10 have done, especially for our entry
11 level positions, so our recreation
12 outreach worker, ARL, rec leader
13 trainee, and even our grounds
14 maintenance facility worker, we have
15 changed the specs since 2019
16 multiple times to decrease any
17 barriers for our seasonals to come
18 into full-time employment.

19 Since 2019, and remember
20 during the years of COVID, we did
21 have a hiring freeze. We -- but we
22 had 141 people that were seasonals
23 that are in permanent employment.
24 And that's just from four titles.

1 That does not include administrative
2 positions where folks have gone from
3 seasonal to administrative
4 positions, clerks and those sorts of
5 things. So that probably goes up to
6 about 170. So there's an organic
7 thing that happens in parks and
8 recreation when people work as
9 seasonals, they are -- their
10 experience qualifies them for full-
11 time permanent positions within
12 parks and recreation. So we do have
13 a pathway.

14 One of the things that we
15 are trying to do more is really
16 communicate those opportunities for
17 folks. Last Saturday we had a job
18 fair at Mander Recreation Center.
19 It was supposed to be at The Dell
20 Music Center, but because of the
21 weather we moved it indoors. We had
22 over 250 people come out for that.

23 We're going to transition
24 those folks into about 180, who are

1 probably young people, so we're
2 going to give them opportunities in
3 our C2L program during the summer.
4 And also put other folks into either
5 seasonal opportunities or full-time
6 opportunities.

7 Office of Human Resources
8 was also at Mander Recreation Center
9 with their big bus outside, they
10 shared all of the information, got
11 contact information for folks, folks
12 even put in applications that same
13 day. So we are moving to decrease
14 the barriers for permanent
15 employment, and I think we've been
16 doing a pretty good job. We're
17 going to continue to move forward.

18 One of the other things
19 that we are doing when you think
20 about skilled trades positions, even
21 working with some of our seasonal
22 staff to get them qualified to get
23 into some of those hard to fill
24 positions with skilled trades.

1 Because that is a challenge not just
2 for the City of Philadelphia, but
3 hiring skilled trades positions is a
4 challenge across the nation and it's
5 evident by the bonuses that the
6 Office of Human Services has offered
7 to skilled trades -- to most of the
8 skill trades positions.

9 COUNCILMEMBER GAUTHIER:

10 Thank you so much.

11 MS. WASHINGTON: So what
12 was the maintenance question, I'm
13 sorry?

14 COUNCILMEMBER GAUTHIER:

15 What are we doing to ensure that we
16 don't get back to the place we were
17 where there was a need for a \$400
18 million capital program? Because
19 essentially we just did not take
20 care of maintenance for years. What
21 are we doing every single budget
22 cycle to avoid that starting with
23 this one?

24 MS. SLAWSON: It was --

1 there's been a neglect in the system
2 for decades. This isn't a couple
3 years of not managing our
4 facilities. There's been years of
5 not addressing regular everyday
6 challenges. And just like your
7 home, if you have a little leak in
8 your roof and you allow it to go for
9 a year or two and you continue to
10 patch and it's a 20-year roof,
11 you're going to eventually have a
12 roof that's going to cave in. And
13 so now we're talking -- we're
14 talking facilities throughout the
15 City of Philadelphia.

16 One of the things that's
17 going to make a huge difference is
18 this asset management system that
19 I'm talking about. And we've come
20 up with a system where we are deep
21 cleaning our facilities, and I'm
22 working on coming up with some
23 inspectors to actually go and
24 inspect our facilities because it's

1 -- we have to hold people
2 accountable for what's going on in
3 our systems. And you can't hold
4 people accountable if you're not
5 saying these are some of the
6 challenges.

7 And sometimes when you're
8 working in a facility and you are
9 there day in and day out, you miss
10 some things. And so you can't --
11 you just miss some things. But if
12 you have people that are
13 specifically assigned to go around
14 and look to check various items in
15 your facility, I go to the
16 facilities and so I am looking, and
17 I maybe looking for something
18 different but we're going to have a
19 list of what we should be looking
20 for.

21 I have a -- we started, I
22 want to say the second month after I
23 was assigned here, a decluttering of
24 our facilities. We have things that

1 have been in our facilities for 30
2 years in closets.

3 And so we have a system in
4 place now where we are going
5 throughout all of our facilities and
6 we're decluttering, we're also deep
7 cleaning, we're stripping floors.
8 But then on top of that, we are
9 checking our roofs, we're checking
10 our HVAC systems, but we need a
11 system so when we check it, we're
12 putting it somewhere and we're
13 identifying that it needs to be
14 done.

15 COUNCILMEMBER GAUTHIER:
16 Quick -- super quick follow-up.

17 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
18 So you have an asset management --

19 MS. SLAWSON: The asset
20 management system.

21 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
22 -- that you're going to be doing
23 moving forward, correct?

24 MS. SLAWSON: Yes. Yes.

1 COUNCILMEMBER GAUTHIER:

2 Super quick follow-up. One, can you
3 give us the timing on the asset
4 management? And listing what we
5 need to do is wonderful but we need
6 money, right? And when I came in
7 here this morning, I actually was
8 talking to Dr. Phillips and we were
9 talking about Denver and how Denver
10 prioritizes their public spaces.
11 You can tell in every public space
12 you go into. So the timing on the
13 asset management and what are we
14 doing on the money side to take care
15 of these issues?

16 MS. SLAWSON: So, I can --
17 I just had my team put a proposal
18 together once identified that we did
19 not have one and we needed one. So
20 I can't honestly give you a timing
21 on it. I know that it's something
22 that I'm working pretty hard to get
23 into place but I don't have a timing
24 for you.

1 COUNCILMEMBER GAUTHIER:

2 Okay. If that it could be something
3 that you follow-up with --

4 MS. SLAWSON: Okay.

5 COUNCILMEMBER GAUTHIER: --
6 that would be great.

7 MS. SLAWSON: Thank you.

8 COUNCILMEMBER GAUTHIER:
9 It's very exciting to hear that.
10 Thank you so much.

11 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
12 Thank you. When you get a chance,
13 just provide that information to the
14 Chair, Members of the Committee,
15 very briefly, chairman of Parks and
16 Rec. Your point of information,
17 sir? Dr. Phillips?

18 COUNCILMEMBER PHILLIPS:
19 Yes, just a point of
20 information. I think that what
21 we're just looking for, and it's
22 something that the commissioner has
23 pointed out. What's important is
24 that we do have annual things that

1 we put in the budget to work towards
2 our Parks and Rec systems such as
3 the lighting, all that and more. So
4 that's why I said, I think you
5 answered it earlier, but it's beyond
6 that, you know.

7 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

8 Thank you, Dr. Phillips.

9 COUNCILMEMBER PHILLIPS:

10 Real quick. She just said --

11 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

12 Thank you, Phillips. The Chair
13 recognizes --

14 COUNCILMEMBER PHILLIPS:

15 I'll bring it up later.

16 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

17 -- Councilmember Dr. Nina Ahmad?

18 COUNCILMEMBER AHMAD: Thank
19 you.

20 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

21 Then Councilmember Brooks, thank you
22 for waiting patiently. Then we'll
23 go into the second round.

24 COUNCILMEMBER AHMAD: Thank

1 you, Council President. I first
2 want to commend both of you and your
3 departments for not being the
4 traditional front line essential
5 workers but you are.

6 Your work actually heads
7 off and stops the problems
8 downstream. So investing in you
9 both in libraries and Parks And Recs
10 is essential for us. And so I'm
11 very glad to see so much engagement
12 around that.

13 I have a quick question
14 about -- I'll start with the library
15 system. Do you have a way of
16 looking at the data to see where is
17 the -- what is the usage of your
18 services across the city? And the
19 reason I'm asking that is I'm sure
20 you're going to -- if you've done
21 this already, you probably see it's
22 not equivalent across the city.

23 And based on that, do you
24 deploy resources to those spaces

1 that are under using libraries and
2 co-locate resources with the library
3 system to serve those underutilized
4 spaces?

5 And I am thinking of things
6 like mobile libraries or ways to
7 reach people where they are so they
8 can see the library as a way to be
9 an asset to them.

10 MR. RICHARDS: Thank you,
11 Councilperson. I appreciate the
12 question. Good question. Yes, we
13 can look at our data to determine
14 how much a library is being used,
15 what kinds of materials people
16 check, our borrowing from the
17 library, you know, we've gotten
18 better with calculating the number
19 of people coming in and out of the
20 door based on a budget request that
21 you approved last year.

22 So we are able to know how
23 many people in some of our buildings
24 at any moment. So yeah, we can --

1 we can do that and then we staff too
2 based on the number of people coming
3 in and out, how busy buildings are,
4 relative to the size, you know, of
5 the building.

6 So, we look at all that
7 data, that is something libraries
8 do. We -- you know, our mobility is
9 not in like a mobile library. We
10 don't -- we don't have that yet. At
11 one point the library did but we --
12 you know, our staff, you know, we
13 partner with all kinds of other
14 organizations, other nonprofits,
15 different city agencies to provide
16 programming throughout the city
17 depending on what the needs are,
18 what the requests are to ask, or
19 even if we just think this is
20 something that should be done. So
21 yes, we do have that data and we do
22 look into it to provide services.

23 COUNCILMEMBER AHMAD: So I
24 just want to make sure, I -- when I

1 was deputy Mayor for Jim Kenney's
2 first term, I worked with
3 Playstreets and we took books and,
4 you know, these spaces that were
5 closed off to make sure children had
6 food, but we also supplemented with
7 books for the kids and sat and read
8 with them. So that was sort of a
9 model of meeting people where they
10 are.

11 But the follow through on
12 that, knowing that those were spaces
13 where these things were needed is
14 what really is a bit concerning that
15 we know where there's under
16 utilization of these resources, but
17 I don't know what the intersectional
18 follow-up is. That's what I would
19 love to see both from Parks and Recs
20 and the library along with other
21 resources.

22 So for example, if we are
23 understanding this particular space
24 is not using the library, and then

1 we go overlay that with our
2 proficiency in math and reading,
3 right, from the school district.

4 And if we can then -- and
5 then we look at housing needs or
6 really have a comprehensive look to
7 see how we deploy resources there.
8 Because those children who are not
9 having access to these resources are
10 whose, you know, whose experiences
11 are not being broadened, are going
12 to suffer for no fault of their own.

13 So I really want to think
14 more philosophically how we really
15 address the needs of our youngest
16 Philadelphians who cannot advocate
17 for themselves. We have -- we have
18 children in certain neighborhoods
19 and families who have these broad
20 based knowledge. While I'm -- I
21 appreciate, you know, making sure
22 people have job skills, but we need
23 to make sure they're global citizens
24 who understand the world. And

1 that's where libraries come in. You
2 can travel the whole world just
3 sitting in your library.

4 And so I think while we
5 emphasize making sure job skills and
6 they're ready to put food on their
7 table, we also need food for their
8 mind. And I don't want that to be
9 overlooked because we are so
10 specific on some tangible skills
11 we're giving them. Because you go
12 to some of these well-resourced
13 schools, they're getting that while
14 those kids are not. So I just want
15 to elevate that issue.

16 And very quickly, I would
17 like to pivot to -- before you
18 answer, pivot to the Parks and Recs
19 same thing about how much are we
20 engaging young people to decide on
21 programming. This was one of -- a
22 conversation I was having yesterday
23 with somebody who was a teacher, and
24 she was saying that the engagement

1 of young people to decide
2 programming and rec centers, she was
3 asking if that happens, right? And
4 do we have things like youth
5 advisory councils for our --

6 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
7 Ask the question, Dr. Ahmad. Ask
8 the question.

9 COUNCILMEMBER AHMAD: Yeah.
10 Do we have pathways for young people
11 to be engaged to give feedback, what
12 do they want? What do they want in
13 those spaces? What would make them
14 come to those spaces?

15 And do we have advisory
16 councils made of young people who
17 might be able to advise us on that?

18 I really want young people
19 to see that not only are we doing
20 this, but it's for them. And how
21 are we being intentional about
22 showing them that? Thank you,
23 Council President.

24 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

1 You are welcome, Dr. Ahmad.

2 COUNCILMEMBER AHMAD: I
3 would like a response.

4 MS. SLAWSON: So I want to
5 -- I'll start. I want to
6 specifically talk about just
7 engaging our young people and
8 finding out what it is that they
9 want. One of the things that we are
10 going to start are listening
11 sessions.

12 When I was here first go
13 around, I did some listening
14 sessions in a specific area, and
15 because it was an area where there
16 were no programs going on for the
17 young people. And as a result of
18 the listening sessions, we ended up
19 not only filling up the space but
20 having a school next to us give us
21 -- pay us for their kids to come.

22 So if you go and find out
23 and have conversations with young
24 people and you're serious about

1 finding out what they want, they
2 will come. So we are in the process
3 of doing that. And we actually have
4 leaders that work with their kids.

5 We did the eSports that is
6 -- that has been talked about. We
7 recognize that we had to adapt and
8 just kind of remain relevant to
9 changing interests and the needs of
10 our communities especially teens who
11 often are our most vulnerable. And
12 they're hard to engage. It's really
13 challenging to engage them. And so
14 we partnered with Nerd Street Games,
15 a nationally renowned organization
16 whose mission is to increase access
17 to the gaming industry.

18 The partnership produced
19 the following: A team driven NBA 2K
20 tournament with over 100
21 participants, eSports coach training
22 for summer camp staff and
23 supervisors, camp trips -- camp
24 trips to Nerd Street local host

1 gaming site, specialty camp
2 opportunity for 24 youth to attend a
3 full week eSports camp. eSports
4 centers, we have them at two of our
5 sites. And thanks to INET, we'll be
6 able to actually get more e-sites.

7 But this is a direct result
8 of what you're saying, having
9 conversations with our young people
10 and identifying what it is they
11 need. But then once you do that,
12 you got to actually do work.

13 COUNCILMEMBER AHMAD: Yeah.
14 Thank you for that.

15 MR. RICHARDS: And at the
16 library to address, you know, how we
17 address your comments, you know,
18 we've got teen librarians and youth
19 librarians who work in a library and
20 they're talking to young people
21 every day. And we have a youth
22 services coordinator who oversees,
23 you know, all of our district
24 centered programming and efforts for

1 the whole city. So -- and through
2 that role, we're partnering with
3 other nonprofits, other
4 organizations, looking at what those
5 overall city needs are. But
6 individually by neighborhood, we
7 have staff in those locations.

8 You know -- you know, Sue
9 and I, we are like symbiotic, but
10 some people want to -- want to read
11 and come in the library and do arts
12 and culture and do those kind of
13 events after they finish, you know,
14 recreational activities. And so
15 we're communicating with them.
16 Sue's team's communicating with them
17 too. So we are hearing what they're
18 wanting and what they're needing and
19 we're not just solely focused on,
20 you know, job skills. We're focused
21 on their mind.

22 And, you know, one of the
23 things about the library, you can
24 actually -- you can go in the

1 library and you can leave the
2 universe. You can go anywhere,
3 travel through a black hole, you
4 know, those kinds of things, and
5 that creativity and the story time
6 and the -- and the things we do to
7 just enlighten and inspire young
8 people. And we just have, you know,
9 staff that that's what they do on a
10 regular and daily basis. And we're
11 listening to the young people. And
12 that's why we can have 30,000
13 programs -- 26 to 30,000 programs
14 because hearing from them and what
15 they want, what's going to inspire
16 them and their friends.

17 COUNCILMEMBER AHMAD: Thank
18 you, Council President.

19 MS. SLAWSON: Council
20 President Johnson, can I just say
21 this? And I also wanted to say we
22 do have youth councils in our
23 facilities.

24 COUNCILMEMBER AHMAD: Okay.

1 Wonderful.

2 MS. SLAWSON: Thank you.

3 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

4 Thank you. The Chair recognize the
5 presence of Councilmember Brian
6 O'Neill. Councilmember Brooks.

7 COUNCILMEMBER BROOKS:

8 Thank you, Council President. I
9 think I just want -- I'm going to
10 start with a combined question for
11 Parks and Rec around --

12 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
13 Member Brooks, could you speak into
14 the microphone, please?

15 COUNCILMEMBER BROOKS: Yes.
16 Around the asset management systems
17 because it's around the same line
18 that I was going with the library
19 system. We see that the school
20 district of Philadelphia is in
21 crisis now for this similar
22 situation and I was wondering if
23 both of you, could both kind of work
24 on a plan so we can figure out long-

1 term structure for Parks and Rec, as
2 well as the libraries moving
3 forward.

4 So we know what we need to
5 do in the next 20 to 30 years to
6 secure our building and thank you so
7 much for starting that progress.

8 And then I wanted to kind
9 of comment off of -- Councilmember
10 Gauthier mentioned Level Up. I
11 visited the program as well and
12 they're doing an amazing job. And I
13 would be nice if you, Parks and Rec
14 in the library system connect with
15 these young folks and the leader of
16 that group for next steps and how
17 can we integrate them back in the
18 system.

19 And my other question was
20 around workers primarily for
21 municipal guards and library
22 assistant. I asked like, what is
23 the process around hiring for that?
24 And if you can give us something in

1 writing around exactly what's --
2 what are we doing to make sure that
3 these positions are filled and that
4 they have a livable wage, because I
5 heard that they were paid kind of
6 low. I'm not sure what the exact
7 dollar amount is but these are the
8 folks that keep our libraries
9 running.

10 And my last thing, I must
11 -- I want to talk about Carousel
12 House. I read about it in the
13 paper. I know we all saw that. And
14 I was wondering, like, what are the
15 next steps for folks with
16 disabilities around the city to have
17 access because now a two-year
18 project is going to be 10, 7, I
19 don't -- my numbers are mixed up.
20 Because I know they closed during
21 COVID and it was the premier project
22 for folks with disabilities to be
23 able to have access to sports and
24 rec. And now we're talking about

1 2028 and that's problematic.

2 And to that, they had a
3 wheelchair accessible pool and I
4 know we expanded ramps, and
5 wheelchair accessibility on pools
6 around the city. But what is the
7 status of that? Because the promise
8 is that there will be one wheelchair
9 accessible pool in every district.
10 And I wonder, are we there yet?

11 MS. SLAWSON: So the
12 wheelchair program is still being
13 housed at one of our -- two of our
14 sites, Mayfair, where they used to
15 be able to go to one location which
16 was the Carousel House.

17 Now they have to go to
18 Mayfair and they also use our
19 Gustine Lake location. And they're
20 also using some space over in New
21 Jersey for the actual tournament
22 because they used to do the
23 tournament at the School of the
24 Future.

1 I'm not exactly sure what
2 happened there. It's an amazing
3 program. It's something that we
4 want to continue to be a part of.
5 We want to bring it back and I do
6 know that Aparna can speak to the
7 Carousel House and what's happening
8 there. So she will come and address
9 that. But you had another question
10 in there?

11 COUNCILMEMBER BROOKS: I
12 was wondering about -- I know we --
13 Gustine and the other two of -- the
14 two -- the two rec centers that were
15 kind of allocated for special needs
16 folks, but however, people with
17 special needs live in every
18 community.

19 So I think if we're not
20 going to use a Carousel House for
21 much longer, we need a long-term
22 plan to make sure that folks with
23 varying abilities have the ability
24 to enjoy our parks and rec system.

1 And the problem being is that
2 transportation is hard. Like,
3 having to depend on CCT and all the
4 things, wheelchair accessible vans,
5 the burden of responsibility on
6 caregivers is so great when this is
7 a necessary need in our community.

8 So I would love to see a
9 broader vision or a plan around
10 accessibility of our parks and
11 recreation centers as well as
12 libraries because this is a growing
13 population for various reason and we
14 need to make sure that we're
15 accommodating them as Philadelphia
16 citizens.

17 MS. SLAWSON: That was --
18 that was your other question. The
19 pool lifts. We are -- I knew it was
20 another question before I get up for
21 Aparna. We are in the process of
22 completing our system and getting
23 pool lifts for all of our sites.

24 COUNCILMEMBER BROOKS:

1 Okay. Thank you. Do -- will it be
2 complete for this summer or where it
3 is going to expand into, because
4 we've had this --

5 MS. SLAWSON: Next summer.

6 COUNCILMEMBER BROOKS: This
7 is way before you were here. This
8 was 2020, 2021, during the COVID
9 pandemic when they changed, you
10 know, where everyone was broke. It
11 was like two working in the city.
12 Where are we going to be if, you
13 know, Carousel House is not open
14 till 2028 and we have a huge
15 accessibility issue in our city.

16 MS. SLAWSON: The plan is
17 to have all of the pool lists by the
18 end of next summer.

19 COUNCILMEMBER BROOKS:

20 Okay. Thank you.

21 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
22 Thank you, Member Brooks. Before we
23 go into the brief second round,
24 because we have a hard stop at

1 12:30, I just had a question. Why
2 is it taking so long for us to fix
3 and reopen the Carousel House? Just
4 wanted to know.

5 MS. PALANTINO:

6 Councilmember Brooks, thank you for
7 that question. Council President,
8 with regards to Carousel House,
9 there have been -- first of all, it
10 had to close due to conditions.
11 There were a number of roof issues
12 which resulted in structural issues
13 so it would've closed regardless of
14 the project.

15 As far as the Rebuild
16 project goes, it is in design.
17 We've just negotiated. We are
18 continuing design for that project.
19 After COVID prices did certainly go
20 up, there are -- so we had to align
21 this scope of the project with the
22 resources we had. The
23 administration did put in more
24 money. So we are at a point now

1 that we can move forward with the
2 scope of that work. Design is
3 ongoing and we expect to start
4 construction next year, which
5 results in the two-year construction
6 duration.

7 With regards, however, I
8 would like to make a global
9 statement if I could, in terms of
10 inclusive projects at Parks and
11 Recreation, that has become the norm
12 for every site that we do a capital
13 project at. We don't add that as
14 sort of a feature. We include that
15 in the design of all the spaces. So
16 every playground -- every spray
17 ground, every building, all of that
18 inherently is accessible to folks,
19 to everyone, to every Philadelphian.

20 COUNCILMEMBER BROOKS: I do
21 appreciate that because that's the
22 law, like, we're required to do
23 that. But what are we doing for --
24 it's a slow process.

1 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

2 Speak into the microphone, Member
3 Brooks.

4 COUNCILMEMBER BROOKS: I
5 said, I appreciate that because
6 that's the law. That's what ADA
7 tells us that we need to do. But
8 what are we doing for sites that
9 aren't, if the backlog for a project
10 that started in 2021 is 2028? What
11 are we going to do for generations
12 of young people with special needs
13 that won't be able to assess our
14 parks and rec? If you think about
15 eight years, that's kindergarten
16 through middle school.

17 MS. PALANTINO: And I know
18 Parks and Recreation, as
19 Commissioner Slawson did mention has
20 relocated some of that programming
21 to other sites so that we continue
22 to serve those populations.

23 COUNCILMEMBER BROOKS:

24 Okay. Because I just would like to

1 see a comprehensive plan on what are
2 we doing for people with
3 disabilities in our city across city
4 agencies so it's not just you. City
5 hall is not that accessible,
6 municipal buildings aren't that
7 accessible, parks, recs, libraries.
8 We need to have a comprehensive plan
9 because our children and citizens
10 need that. And I would just would
11 like to see a clear plan and not
12 allowing people to be left behind.

13 MS. PALANTINO: Absolutely.
14 Thank you.

15 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
16 Thank you. We will now go into a
17 brief second round. I just have one
18 quick question. Well, two small
19 ones. One, and I think this has
20 been touched on. I still want to go
21 on the record on it because I have a
22 couple of constituents that will
23 call on my district team wanting me
24 to make sure I have it on the

1 record. Addressing the issue of
2 heating at recreational facilities
3 during the winter time.

4 And so is there a
5 comprehensive plan for us to do
6 analysis of our heating systems at
7 our recreational facilities? And
8 also cameras was also a major
9 request regarding making sure we
10 have equitable camera coverage of
11 the rec centers across the district,
12 particularly in the 2nd.

13 MS. PALANTINO: Yes, with
14 regards to your first question,
15 Counsel President, we have, with all
16 of our client agencies this year,
17 libraries included parks and
18 recreation, set aside money for
19 assessments of facilities.

20 It's something that was
21 last done in 2005 so we're 20 years,
22 we're at the end of life cycle of
23 pretty much everything in a building
24 at this point. So that is something

1 we have decided to do across all
2 city facilities to be able to better
3 program for the out years for the
4 projects that need to be done.

5 And so that, of course,
6 includes heating systems as well as
7 roofs, et cetera. And then we will
8 prioritize based on those
9 assessments, the most critical
10 projects and put those into the
11 five-year plan for funding. With
12 regards to cameras, we have a
13 handful of sites that are remaining
14 in the camera program and we can get
15 you a updated list of where cameras
16 are installed.

17 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

18 Thank you.

19 MS. PALANTINO: There's
20 over 2,500 in the system --

21 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

22 Yes.

23 MS. PALANTINO: -- in Parks
24 and Recreation currently. And there

1 are some sites that are in
2 construction, so every site that
3 goes into construction does receive
4 cameras as well as part of the
5 project.

6 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

7 Thank you very much. This is a
8 lightning round. The chair
9 recognizes the following members:
10 Councilmember Cindy Bass,
11 Dr. Phillips, O'Rourke, Harrity and
12 Young. Spread.

13 COUNCILMEMBER BASS: Thank
14 you.

15 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
16 Vice Chair Bass.

17 COUNCILMEMBER BASS: Thank
18 you.

19 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
20 Is who actually introduced the bill
21 and provided the funding for the
22 cameras. Kicked it off at Marian
23 Anderson Rec in South Philly.

24 COUNCILMEMBER BASS: Yes,

1 we did kick it off in the 2nd
2 district. Thank you very much for
3 accommodating us. And I want to
4 just, as a reminder, the camera
5 program was supported by all members
6 of council, all district members who
7 made a commitment to use their ITEF
8 funding to ensure that we had
9 cameras, you know, in a -- in a
10 faster timeframe.

11 So thanks to all the
12 members, who were there and thanks
13 to those who are there now who are
14 still continuing to see this project
15 through.

16 And I did want to ask about
17 the cameras. Can you give us an
18 update on exactly how many cameras
19 are installed? I believe we should
20 have touched all of our sites by
21 now, but I know that there are a
22 number of sites that are requesting
23 additional cameras.

24 MS. SLAWSON: Thank you for

1 that question, Councilmember Bass.

2 And I actually remember you making
3 sure that you worked with your
4 fellow Council Members to get this
5 program up and running.

6 COUNCILMEMBER BASS: Yes.

7 MS. SLAWSON: And so, to
8 date we have 2,228 cameras in our
9 system. The actual list of how many
10 cameras, where they are, how many
11 you have in your site, we have that.

12 And Council President, I
13 will submit that to you so you could
14 submit it to Council. We have 13
15 centers and playgrounds and seven
16 other PPR sites where cameras will
17 be -- have been installed since
18 January 2024 until now. That was 13
19 centers. We have 174 total sites
20 that have been outfitted with
21 cameras. We have six under
22 construction, and I have all those
23 locations for you, but it would take
24 -- you would probably tell me to be

1 quiet if I started listening --
2 listing them. We also have nine
3 sites that are in design. But we
4 have 27 sites that remain to be
5 designed. And there's an estimated
6 cost of \$1.25 million for those
7 cameras, those 27 cameras to be
8 designed. But I will present that
9 information to you, sir.

10 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

11 Thank you very much.

12 COUNCILMEMBER BASS: That
13 would be great. Can I just say one
14 other thing real quick? I did want
15 to acknowledge the -- our library
16 director and thank him for his
17 outstanding work, particularly
18 around you and your teams
19 outstanding work, particularly
20 around the Nicetown-Tioga Library
21 which was closed during the great
22 earthquake of 2024 here in
23 Philadelphia. You know, somehow the
24 library was affected, you know, but

1 I did want to thank you for that.

2 And also wanted to make
3 mention for those who don't know
4 that that's the only library in the
5 city of Philadelphia that has a job
6 center operating out of it in
7 partnership with my office and NWON
8 Opportunities, Myra Brown and the
9 Free Library of Philadelphia. So,
10 we offer job training, resume
11 writing, interviewing skills, you
12 know, we -- career fairs, all kinds
13 of things at the library in the
14 neighborhood. So I just wanted to
15 say thank you very much for that.

16 And really quickly, the
17 playground inclusion bill. I
18 noticed you mentioned that
19 Councilman Driscoll was getting some
20 upgrades. We passed the bill, I
21 think it was like 2016, for the
22 playground inclusion bill. Would
23 that require that all sites as
24 they're addressed, as they're being

1 renovated, will be upgraded to
2 include additional needs for those
3 who are disabled and for seniors?

4 And so I know you mentioned
5 that Councilman Driscoll was getting
6 that, but I was hoping that that's,
7 you know, sort of the standard
8 across the board.

9 And I know we're short on
10 time, so you don't have to answer
11 that now but if you could just
12 respond in writing to the council
13 president, that would be great.

14 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
15 Thank you.

16 COUNCILMEMBER BASS: Thank
17 you.

18 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
19 The Chair recognizes Councilmember
20 Phillips.

21 COUNCILMEMBER PHILLIPS:
22 Thank you. I just wanted to quickly
23 comment on the -- one information
24 and then go into the question. Yes,

1 the time -- one of the things that
2 we did on our PPR walks and tours,
3 we noticed that there's paint things
4 that we can do small things through
5 capital funded paint, it could be
6 pavement, it could be walls.

7 So, you know, I think I
8 just want to note that the
9 commissioner has committed to
10 working on some sort of plan around
11 that. So I'm looking forward to
12 seeing what that looks like. And
13 I'm looking -- I thank you also,
14 Director Richards, for working on
15 your long-term plan as well around
16 infrastructure as Councilman
17 Gauthier mentioned.

18 Quick question for Director
19 Richards. What plans are in place
20 to ensure expanded hours are
21 supported with high quality
22 programming at our rec centers? And
23 then talk about the marketing plan
24 that you have that you're going to

1 be working on to market some of the
2 high quality programs that are
3 happening in our rec centers.

4 And then also for our
5 commissioner, if you could just
6 really briefly speak on the
7 programming that our rec centers
8 need that you've been -- that we've
9 observed around our boxing program
10 as well as our gaming program and
11 other, like, mentorship type
12 programs as well.

13 And then the last thing is
14 just this -- a list of -- you have
15 -- what would you do with more
16 capital project funding? How many
17 -- you know, how many in your
18 capital project budget -- you got
19 about \$12 million that are probably
20 set aside for, you know, for just
21 already established Rebuild projects
22 as well as ITEF, but you don't have
23 much money to do maintenance for
24 what I observe. So how much more

1 money could you use for that? Thank
2 you. Done.

3 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

4 You want to provide half of that in
5 writing because we are not going to
6 get it in right now, just to be
7 frank. So how do you want to
8 handle, Dr. Phillips? Answer what
9 you can, the rest in writing,
10 please, because I want my other
11 members to get their line of
12 question in before we bang the gavel
13 at 12:30.

14 MR. RICHARDS: We'll try to
15 do some of that in writing because
16 in regards to programming and future
17 programming for libraries and our
18 communications plan, I can talk
19 about that for a long time. But I
20 will say our communications plan, it
21 -- we -- it's new. We have a new
22 communications department and a new
23 communications lead, and we're
24 building out that department. One

1 of the things about the library, and
2 the types of programming that we
3 have, you know, sometimes it could
4 be a hidden secret to just the
5 people who know.

6 So we're going to be with
7 our new comms leadership and our
8 department, we're going to be
9 pushing out that information on
10 social media, you know, and
11 throughout the community in a
12 variety of different ways to promote
13 what our library staff are doing in
14 the branches. Because, you know,
15 they've done a great job over the
16 years doing it themselves. But now,
17 we are going to be doing it
18 centralized with their support.

19 But, you know, the number
20 of programming -- the number of
21 programming that we're going to be
22 doing in our branches, that's just
23 going to increase the more hours
24 that we're open, the more staff we

1 have.

2 And the centralized
3 programming that we're -- we now are
4 able to do if -- significantly
5 because of the, you know, the budget
6 that Council's given us and the
7 Mayor. We --

8 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
9 Thank you, Mr. Richards.

10 MR. RICHARDS: Just expect
11 that number to increase.

12 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
13 Thank you, sir. The Chair
14 recognizes Councilmember Young,
15 Harrity and Isaiah Thomas. You have
16 a brief one because we are stopping
17 at 12:30.

18 COUNCILMEMBER YOUNG: Thank
19 you, Mr. President. This is a
20 capital question. I was recently, I
21 guess, quoted that it will cost
22 about \$700,000 to do a study for a
23 plan or plans for a rec center in my
24 district. But we are -- the whole

1 study for Market East is like 750.
2 Can you tell us, like, what's -- why
3 it costs this much to just prepare a
4 study to help renovate, you know,
5 one of our rec centers.

6 MS. PALANTINO:
7 Councilmember Young, if you could
8 just be a little more specific on
9 perhaps the project or the size of
10 the project.

11 COUNCILMEMBER YOUNG: So
12 Dendy, right?

13 MS. PALANTINO: I'm sorry?

14 COUNCILMEMBER YOUNG:
15 Dendy, right?

16 MS. PALANTINO: Uh-huh.

17 COUNCILMEMBER YOUNG: We
18 were quoted saying it will cost
19 \$700,000 to just prepare, like, the
20 design and plans and all that stuff
21 just for that one center. But we
22 are -- again, we're putting forth a
23 study for Market East area that
24 costs 725, 750, whatever that is.

1 Like, what's the -- can you describe
2 the -- tell us the cost discrepancy
3 in that?

4 MS. PALANTINO: Thank you
5 for providing that clarity. So,
6 design costs are typically anywhere
7 from 8 to 12 percent of a final
8 construction cost for a project. So
9 the scope of work at Dendy which
10 probably -- or which potentially
11 included an expansion of a building
12 and some major site improvements
13 were probably of the magnitude that
14 resulted in that estimate for design
15 costs.

16 COUNCILMEMBER YOUNG: Thank
17 you, Mr. President.

18 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
19 Thank you, Member Young.

20 Chair recognizes
21 Councilmember Harrity, then
22 Councilman O'Rourke, and then
23 finishing, Councilmember Thomas.

24 COUNCILMEMBER HARRITY:

1 Thank you, Council President. I
2 will be brief. How many city
3 recreation centers are closed due to
4 construction with the Rebuild
5 program right now? And how does the
6 success to rebuild projects compare
7 to similar projects that have been
8 completed by Parks and Rec itself?

9 In other words, I'm trying
10 to find out where the disconnect is,
11 why this rebuild stuff is taking so
12 much longer than -- I don't want to
13 say that I know, but I feel --

14 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
15 She understands the question. Could
16 you --

17 COUNCILMEMBER HARRITY:
18 Right.

19 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
20 -- respond, please?

21 MS. PALANTINO: Certainly.
22 So with regards to your first
23 question, the number of sites
24 closed, it changes on a daily basis.

1 So I -- we will get you that in
2 writing. Some have come out of
3 construction and some are going in.

4 With regards to the second
5 question about the duration, the
6 rebuilt projects are generally much
7 larger in scope. Typically, we
8 don't have a 20 to a million-dollar
9 parks and rec capital project. So
10 that is one of the primary reasons
11 it has taken so long for rebuilt
12 projects to be completed.

13 The second is as you may
14 have seen, we've adjusted some
15 process internally to expedite those
16 projects and we've been able to find
17 other contracting mechanisms,
18 typical city process, for example,
19 to be able to move those along
20 quicker.

21 COUNCILMEMBER HARRITY:
22 Okay. I mean, I just feel as though
23 that it kind of ran a little bit
24 more smoother when you guys were in

1 control of everything. I think
2 sometimes when you --

3 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
4 Speak into the microphone, sir.

5 COUNCILMEMBER HARRITY: I
6 think sometimes when you get a lot
7 of consultants and all involved and
8 they have to justify their salaries,
9 things tend to take longer.

10 MS. PALANTINO: Thank you.
11 Understood.

12 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
13 Thank you. The Chair recognizes
14 Councilmember Nicholas O'Rourke.

15 COUNCILMEMBER O'ROURKE:
16 Thank you, Mr. President. The Rec
17 staff as well as the Rangers,
18 Commissioner Slawson, are reporting
19 chronic shortages of essential tools
20 like radios and flashlights,
21 vehicles that need maintenance, poor
22 lighting, which I heard you
23 appreciate, already mentioned that
24 you want to do more on that. But

1 also significant delays in how
2 supplies are actually distributed,
3 especially with the summer programs
4 just around the corner as I know
5 that you're already thinking about
6 -- quite a bit about. We can all
7 sympathize with the pain of not
8 having what you need when you need
9 it.

10 How was the '26 budget
11 addressing the persistent supply and
12 infrastructure gaps? And what steps
13 does the department take to ensure
14 timely equitable delivery of the
15 materials and the equipment the
16 staff actually needs, front lines
17 workers needs across all those
18 sites?

19 MS. WASHINGTON: Good
20 afternoon. So we are working with
21 our Ranger unit. We meet with them
22 regularly, so we're in a process of
23 working with Fleet to get vehicles,
24 to get the lights on the vehicles to

1 get all the equipment that they need
2 and training, whether it is getting
3 electric bikes or those sorts of
4 things.

5 So we are working on that
6 process now. It is a procurement
7 process. Hopefully we will have
8 most of the supplies in this summer,
9 but we have been working to identify
10 exactly what supplies our Rangers
11 need, also, what training that they
12 need to make sure that they are safe
13 and that they can do their jobs
14 effectively.

15 And this is not just for
16 our permanent rangers, but we hire
17 about 15 to 16 seasonal rangers to
18 help us doing the height of our
19 season. So we're bringing those
20 folks on now, hopefully all of them
21 will be on if they kind of, you
22 know, go through the onboarding
23 process quickly. They'll all be on
24 by the end of June.

1 COUNCILMEMBER O'ROURKE:

2 Thank you, Mr. President.

3 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

4 Thank you, Member O'Rourke. Member
5 Thomas and then we're wrapping up
6 with O'Neill. We have to be brief
7 because we had stop at 12:30. We've
8 been here since 10:00.

9 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: Good
10 to go, Council President?

11 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
12 I just --

13 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS:
14 First of all, good morning. This is
15 my first line of questioning. So,
16 Commissioner, thank you for last
17 night, Councilmember Bass's district
18 along with other elected officials.
19 I Understand it's a late night,
20 going into an early morning. I'm
21 wondering from both of you, how much
22 of a priority is it to use your
23 facilities to help promote, push,
24 and encourage the creative economy?

1 We spoke before about
2 gaming and libraries as well as in
3 rec centers. I'm thinking about the
4 film industry. I'm thinking about
5 music. What are we doing to be
6 creative and innovative to make sure
7 that our spaces are not only
8 welcoming to the creative economy,
9 but we are encouraging the next
10 generation to maximize their
11 God-given talent while
12 simultaneously creating space for
13 adults who want to be professionals
14 to use our facility to maximize
15 their ability.

16 MS. SLAWSON: So for our
17 youth, we have a performing arts
18 program that is phenomenal. And,
19 yeah, they just gave me notes. I'm
20 going off the top of my head. But
21 -- and I would love to invite you --
22 and I'm going to be quick. But as
23 far as other people that are adults
24 that want to engage, we have

1 facilities where we would love for
2 them to come in and use those
3 spaces.

4 MR. RICHARDS: We provide a
5 lot of those activities now. And
6 what I could do is put something in
7 writing to let you know what we do
8 and what -- and what some of the
9 numbers are.

10 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS:
11 Council President, I just want to go
12 on the record and continue to push
13 us as a city to do better as it
14 relates to promoting the creative
15 economy. I've been advocating a lot
16 around gaming, thinking about the
17 film industry, thinking about the
18 arts industry. 2026 is on the
19 horizon. We want to make sure that
20 people could perform and maximize
21 their talent in safe spaces. We
22 want to attract people here to our
23 city and we want to partner with our
24 rec centers and our libraries to

1 make sure that young people and
2 tourists can take advantage of this.
3 Thank you, Council President.

4 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
5 You're welcome. Absolutely.

6 MS. SLAWSON: Council
7 President, can I -- can I throw
8 something in. It'll take me 60
9 seconds maybe.

10 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
11 Sure.

12 MS. SLAWSON: So we have a
13 program called Making Spaces, which
14 I think you'd really be interested
15 in. PPRs Entrepreneur and Residents
16 Initiative. It's focused on youth
17 training, mentorship and business
18 development. With the support of
19 the Knight Foundation Partnership --

20 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
21 I think what you can do also
22 Commissioner --

23 MS. SLAWSON: Was that my
24 60 seconds?

1 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

2 Because we are going to put this
3 down for the record, but this is his
4 mission that he's passionate about
5 as well. So how about you all get
6 together after this --

7 MS. SLAWSON: How about we
8 do that.

9 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
10 -- and then really put that strategy
11 together.

12 MS. SLAWSON: No problem.
13 Thank you.

14 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
15 So it could become a reality as
16 opposed to us just having a hearing
17 about it. He's going to stay on the
18 case. All right?

19 MS. SLAWSON: Okay.

20 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
21 Thank you. O'Neill, very briefly.
22 I'm going to bang the gavel, sir.

23 COUNCILMEMBER O'NEILL:
24 Very brief. I don't know any other

1 way. Thank you, Mr. President.
2 First, I'd like to just thank you on
3 behalf of the Philadelphia
4 Activities Fund, Commissioner, both
5 during the Kenney administration as
6 a mayoral appointment and now as our
7 ex-officio appointment to the -- to
8 the board. You've been not only
9 supportive but integral to the
10 changes that have been made that
11 needed to be made and were very
12 difficult to happen.

13 But following up on
14 Councilman Harrity and the Rebuild
15 project, I could speak all afternoon
16 on my contempt for it, but the --
17 it's only as much contempt as I have
18 for the soda tax, which we could
19 have funded everything else but
20 Rebuild with operating dollars.

21 Regressive, you name it,
22 unfair, but can you -- or revenue
23 through your request get each
24 district a summary of how much their

1 constituents have paid and so to
2 tax. We're now approaching 10
3 years. And how the Rebuild money
4 has been spread among the districts.
5 Because every year we get the same
6 amount of money for our districts.
7 And that's been -- that's long
8 before I got to Council, that
9 practice. And I think it's a very
10 good one. But no one ever asked us
11 to criticize the program and they've
12 spent years working with capital,
13 some of the best people in this city
14 and there's so many good people
15 you'll hate to single them out.

16 But whether it's your
17 operating people, your capital
18 people, they are just first class.
19 And just wanted to say, if you can
20 get me that I'd appreciate it.

21 Thank you.

22 MS. SLAWSON: Thank you. I
23 can get that on the -- give that to
24 you, sir.

1 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

2 Sure. Thank you very much.

3 I want to thank the both of you for
4 your testimony and keep up the good
5 work.

6 Thank you, members. We
7 will be back at 1:30.

8 (Council at recess.)

9

10 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

11 Good afternoon, everyone.

12 We will continue our
13 Committee of the Whole budget
14 hearing. This afternoon, we will
15 have a presentation by the
16 Southeastern Pennsylvania
17 Transportation Authority.

18 With that being said,
19 Ms. Loughhead, will you please call
20 the first panel? The only panel.

21 THE CLERK: Yes. We have
22 Scott Sauer, interim general manager
23 for SEPTA.

24 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

1 Good afternoon, Scott.

2 SEPTA GM MR. SAUER: Good
3 afternoon, Council President.

4 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
5 Good to see you again.

6 SEPTA GM MR. SAUER: Again,
7 yes, sir.

8 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
9 You can state your name and
10 title officially, for the record,
11 and begin your testimony.

12 SEPTA GM MR. SAUER: My
13 name is Scott Sauer and I am the
14 interim general manager of SEPTA.

15 Good afternoon, Council
16 President Johnson, Transportation
17 and Public Utilities Committee Chair
18 Driscoll, members of Philadelphia
19 City Council and guests.

20 I'm pleased to be joined by
21 Chief Charles Lawson of the Transit
22 Police, I'm also joined by members
23 of the SEPTA team representing
24 various departments.

1 Thank you for the
2 opportunity to testify on behalf of
3 SEPTA's budget request as part of
4 the city of Philadelphia's Fiscal
5 Year 2026 budget.

6 The city of Philadelphia's
7 \$135 million contribution under
8 Mayor Parker's budget proposal will
9 help SEPTA meet its state
10 legislatively mandated requirement
11 to secure local matching funds to
12 maximize the state's operating
13 subsidy of \$896 million.

14 Critically, while SEPTA is
15 proposing an auster budget based on
16 current state funding, the city of
17 Philadelphia's proposed contribution
18 reflects a commitment that will
19 match the additional state
20 assistance that would be generated
21 through Governor Shapiro's statewide
22 transit funding plan. Thank you for
23 this strong commitment to SEPTA's
24 future.

1 We are grateful to have the
2 support of City Council on so many
3 SEPTA initiatives over the past
4 year. SEPTA Key Advantage, the Zero
5 Fare pilot, automated bus lane
6 enforcement, the Smoke-Free SEPTA
7 campaign, and the major role that
8 SEPTA played in the success of the
9 Eagle's Super Bowl parade in early
10 February, carrying 400,000 fans to
11 NRG Station, the Parkway, and all
12 points in between.

13 This is my first time
14 testifying before the full Council
15 in my new role. I am the proud son
16 of a trolley operator and have
17 followed my father, Robert, to SEPTA
18 in 1990.

19 I've had a great
20 opportunity to build a career at
21 SEPTA that has included leading the
22 system safety and operations
23 divisions. And now the full
24 organization as its interim general

1 manager.

2 Through both my personal
3 and professional experience, I know
4 how critical SEPTA is to our city
5 and I am committed to seeing us
6 through a crisis that threatens our
7 public transportation system as we
8 know it.

9 Last Thursday, SEPTA
10 released its Fiscal Year 2026 budget
11 that would require 45% service cuts
12 coupled with major fare increases
13 and workforce reductions, to balance
14 a \$213 million budget deficit
15 without a permanent state funding
16 solution for transit.

17 And while we are cutting
18 service we would be asking riders to
19 pay more under a 21.5% fare
20 increase. A 20% service cut would
21 take effect in August, followed in
22 September by the fare increase
23 giving SEPTA the highest single trip
24 fare in North America, alongside MTA

1 of New York, and a complete hiring
2 freeze that would leave critical
3 operations and safety positions
4 unfilled.

5 By next January, cuts then
6 would total 50 bus routes, 25 in the
7 city of Philadelphia alone and
8 service on the five Regional Rail
9 lines that operate over AMTRAK
10 territory, including the Chestnut
11 Hill West would also be eliminated.
12 Remaining bus and rail routes would
13 operate significantly fewer trips
14 and all rail service would end at
15 9:00 p.m each day.

16 Approximately 800,000
17 passenger trips are recorded on
18 SEPTA on an average weekday with
19 this diminished system that we could
20 be forced to operate by January,
21 approximately 350,000 of those trips
22 would be lost. And we expect that
23 more would follow as services
24 degraded.

1 SEPTA will not be able to
2 provide additional service for
3 special events or support the
4 transportation needs of our world
5 class city when we host the World
6 Cup, the Semiquentennial, and other
7 major events planned for next year.

8 SEPTA's budget proposal was
9 extremely difficult for me to
10 present personally and I know is
11 even more difficult for our
12 customers and the public to hear.
13 If implemented, it would effectively
14 dismantle SEPTA, leaving the city
15 and region without the frequent
16 reliable transit service that has
17 been an engine of economic growth,
18 mobility and opportunity for the
19 millions who call Greater
20 Philadelphia home.

21 For more than two years we
22 have been warning that this moment
23 was coming. Now with our new fiscal
24 year starting on July 1, and a state

1 funding solution still not in place,
2 we cannot budget on hope and have no
3 choice, but to budget based on the
4 resources available.

5 But this does not have to
6 happen. Governor Shapiro has
7 proposed a statewide transit funding
8 plan that would prevent these
9 drastic measures from occurring.
10 Legislative action on Governor
11 Shapiro's proposal now would provide
12 stability and certainty for SEPTA
13 and transit agencies across the
14 Commonwealth, to maintain operations
15 and deliver critical service.

16 And I want to take a moment
17 to thank the members of Council for
18 your strong support of SEPTA's
19 efforts to secure funding in
20 Harrisburg. Particularly for
21 participating in Friday's rally and
22 for your strong statements
23 highlighting how critical SEPTA is
24 to the people and communities you

1 represent.

2 I can't tell you how
3 meaningful it is for all our
4 employees to know you have their
5 backs. You are putting your name
6 and actions behind SEPTA, and I want
7 you to know that we are doing all we
8 can to operate efficiently and
9 fulfill our promise to provide the
10 safest, cleanest and most reliable
11 service.

12 This is not a position
13 SEPTA ever wanted to be in and we
14 have worked hard to narrow our
15 budget deficit. An aggressive
16 AUSTERITY plan including a freeze on
17 management pay and cuts to third
18 party consultants, combined with
19 revenue generating measures
20 including a 7.5% fare increase and
21 the resumption of paid parking at
22 regional rail lots, have helped
23 reduce SEPTA's budget deficit from
24 \$240 million in the current fiscal

1 year down to a forecast of \$213
2 million in Fiscal Year 2026.

3 At the same time, we are
4 making important progress on the
5 priorities that matter most to our
6 customers and our funding partners,
7 including a 33% drop in serious
8 crime on the system, the largest
9 one-year decrease in SEPTA's
10 history. The highest number of
11 uniformed transit police officers in
12 more than a decade. Forty-seven
13 consecutive months of year-over-year
14 ridership growth with 11 of 12
15 months in 2024 increasing by 10% or
16 more over 2023.

17 Advancing the top-to-bottom
18 restructuring of cleaning
19 operations, adding 76 front line
20 surface -- surface bus operators.
21 And the completion of contactless
22 payment implementation across all
23 modes.

24 And our customers are

1 noticing, too. SEPTA's first
2 quarter customer satisfaction survey
3 shows statistically significant
4 improvements in every category from
5 safety and cleaning to reliability
6 and convenience. SEPTA's funding
7 crisis is coming at the worst
8 possible time and would undo the
9 steady progress we've been making.

10 We need to keep this
11 positive momentum going for the
12 customers and communities we serve.
13 And I look forward to continuing to
14 work with you on funding and other
15 priorities in the coming year.

16 Thank you for the
17 opportunity to appear before you
18 today in support of SEPTA's Fiscal
19 Year 2026 operating budget request.
20 I'm grateful for your support of
21 SEPTA and I welcome your questions.

22 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

23 Well, thank you very much.

24 Just have a couple brief questions

1 before turning over to members of
2 City Council.

3 I want to start off by
4 acknowledging Wendy Harvey-Green.
5 Just for her hard work and her
6 dedication and representing SEPTA
7 here in City Council through a
8 variety of different transitions of
9 leadership and a variety of
10 different peaks and valleys as it
11 relates to SEPTA moving forward in
12 the city of Philadelphia.

13 I have to remind people,
14 maybe about five or six years ago
15 when I served as Chair of
16 Transportation and Public Utilities,
17 we received the award for having the
18 most outstanding transportation
19 authority. Not in the city of
20 Philadelphia, but in the nation.
21 And so we need to make sure that
22 we're doing everything we can do
23 possibly to support SEPTA during
24 this crisis.

1 We know that in the city of
2 Philadelphia, we have our
3 investment, but we need for our
4 partners on the state level to
5 really, really make sure that we are
6 prepared, not only for 2026. I know
7 that everybody, you know, sounds the
8 alarm and said: Well, we have a
9 crisis with SEPTA and we're not
10 going to be prepared for 2026. And
11 I believe we have to address this
12 issue to be prepared for 2026.

13 But I want to talk about
14 the day-to-day people that use
15 accepted every single day whether
16 that's our children going to and
17 from school, from our seniors going
18 to and from the doctor's office, to
19 our everyday working class families
20 going to and from work. And so we
21 have to always make sure that we're
22 focusing on those most vulnerable
23 and those most in need that rely on
24 SEPTA every single day, even as we

1 prepare for 2026.

2 I also want to acknowledge
3 Pam McCormick, give her a round of
4 applause as well. Because she's in
5 the thick of it in Harrisburg
6 advocating and -- advocating,
7 demanding and getting folks that do
8 not live in the Philadelphia and
9 five county region, who live across
10 this state to look at SEPTA in a
11 favorable light.

12 So we want to support
13 bridges and roads throughout
14 Pennsylvania, and I think that's
15 something we should do. But also
16 making sure that because SEPTA is
17 the economic engine for the region
18 and the city of Philadelphia pretty
19 much provides a significant amount
20 of revenue that makes all parts of
21 Pennsylvania able to thrive, then we
22 should be treated as such. But I'm
23 a former legislator in Harrisburg so
24 such is not the case. And so we

1 want to continue to advocate and be
2 supportive of your efforts.

3 Talk to me about -- and I
4 asked you this earlier when I saw
5 you at a meeting, but I just want to
6 go on the record. I know part of
7 our financial management, we pay \$65
8 million to AMTRAK to utilize their
9 rails. And I know this isn't
10 something that's uncommon.

11 But just go on the record
12 on how we can advocate to
13 restructure that deal with AMTRAK,
14 hopefully in the future. And then
15 obviously you have proposed a
16 significant amount of cuts and I
17 think these are cuts across the
18 board. But how are we still taking
19 consideration those neighborhoods
20 that are already severely not
21 receiving the level of service that
22 we should be giving them just based
23 upon our budgets and our equity.

24 And so can you talk about

1 those two, please?

2 SEPTA GM MR. SAUER: Sure.

3 On the AMTRAK topic. So SEPTA runs
4 three entire lines on AMTRAK
5 territory. The Trenton line, the
6 Wilmington-Newark line and the
7 Paoli-Thorndale line. We also run
8 two other lines on -- partially on
9 AMTRAK territory, those are the
10 Kingwood and the Chestnut Hill West
11 lines.

12 We have an obligation
13 through a legislative action from
14 Congress to pay AMTRAK for the
15 lease, essentially, to run our
16 service on this territory. That
17 covers for -- that covers our
18 operating needs, which would include
19 things like propulsion power and
20 maintenance of the infrastructure.
21 It would also cover -- there's also
22 a portion of it that covers capital
23 needs. So if AMTRAK were to replace
24 track or overhead catenary systems,

1 they would dip into this fund.

2 You're correct in that
3 SEPTA is not the only entity that
4 pays into this. Every state entity,
5 every transit agency that runs on
6 SEPTA -- on AMTRAK territory pays
7 similarly to AMTRAK for that right
8 to run on that territory.

9 The difference in SEPTA,
10 however, than some of our neighbors
11 is because we are not directly
12 controlled by the state government.
13 The state governments in New York
14 and Massachusetts, for example,
15 Maryland, pay directly to AMTRAK
16 from their budgets, whereas SEPTA
17 essentially pays out of our
18 operating funds that we receive from
19 Harrisburg. We pay into that fund.

20 So we -- the 65 million
21 that we've cited as savings is our
22 net savings. So that is short of
23 the other dollars that we would pay
24 them for a variety of issues, and

1 then 65 million is dollar for dollar
2 back into SEPTA's budget just by not
3 operating on that territory.

4 So the actions that we have
5 taken thus far and we continue to
6 take, and this is not a new
7 conversation. We've -- we've had
8 discussions with our congressional
9 delegation on these payments, what
10 they mean to SEPTA. We've also had
11 conversations with PennDOT on ways
12 that they may be able to do
13 something differently for SEPTA.

14 As you know, as I'm sure
15 you're well aware, PENNDOT, the
16 Commonwealth has their own budget
17 deficit that they are dealing with.
18 But they -- as of today, we have to
19 make that payment if we run on that
20 territory, but activity continues to
21 try to advocate for a change in
22 that. It is legislation however, so
23 it would be a heavy lift for
24 Congress to change.

1 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

2 Have you and your team
3 invited Senator Pittman to the city
4 of Philadelphia to take a tour of
5 all the great things SEPTA has to
6 offer here in the city of
7 Philadelphia, since obviously he
8 lives in another part of the state
9 and may have a certain perspective
10 about the city of Philadelphia and
11 the importance or his unimportance
12 of SEPTA to our region?

13 SEPTA GM MR. SAUER: We
14 have and we still hope to meet with
15 Senator Pittman at some point, and
16 I'm sure we will. So whether --
17 whether we can have the Senator here
18 to entertain him with SEPTA and show
19 him all the things -- the really
20 good things that are happening with
21 SEPTA and the city, or if we go to
22 Harrisburg to meet with Senator
23 Pittman. We're open to any way we
24 can have dialogue.

1 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

2 I would recommend you
3 definitely, you and your team, needs
4 to go to Harrisburg like ASAP,
5 yourself. Not a consultant, not,
6 you know, the chamber. You should
7 lead that charge to show how
8 critically important SEPTA is to the
9 region.

10 And, again, I know we keep
11 talking about 2026, which is great
12 and we want SEPTA to be up and
13 running, but I'm also very, very
14 concerned about people who live in
15 our most vulnerable neighborhoods.
16 The people who are the most
17 vulnerable population of individuals
18 who utilize SEPTA day in and day
19 out. Hence why you have an advocate
20 here Councilmember Nicholas
21 O'Rourke, fighting for Zero Fare and
22 making sure that the most vulnerable
23 population is taken care of because
24 they rely on SEPTA everyday.

1 And so whatever we can do
2 to be supportive of those efforts, I
3 worked with Senator Pittman on the
4 state level, but this is also most
5 importantly about advocating to take
6 care the most vulnerable population
7 of individuals who need support.

8 I want you to just briefly,
9 before I turn over it to my members.
10 Because it's easy to come and we
11 give you feedback when SEPTA comes
12 in front of us. A lot of that
13 feedback is very critical because we
14 want to see things being done.

15 You titled some numbers
16 earlier today around the issue of
17 crime and public safety that your
18 team has been working on. That's
19 been something that we in this body
20 has been taking SEPTA to task on day
21 in and day out. So, Scott, give us
22 an update on the progress you have
23 been making regarding public safety.

24 SEPTA GM MR. SAUER: Yes,

1 certainly.

2 And we appreciate the
3 feedback from Council. We -- we
4 take that to heart. And crime
5 reduction safety is no different.
6 So we have heard loud and clear, we
7 need to be safer, we need to be more
8 secure.

9 So the efforts that Chief
10 Lawson particularly has undertaken
11 over the last year plus, has been
12 remarkable, to say the least. We
13 have been able to reduce crime by
14 the highest numbers that we've ever
15 seen in the Transit Police
16 Department's 43-year history down
17 33%. These are remarkable figures.

18 We've been able to raise
19 the ranks, the number of sworn
20 police officers in the -- in the
21 department to 248. We are actually
22 bucking a trend in our neighboring
23 law enforcement agencies where we
24 are seeing positive numbers

1 consistently coming into the police
2 department. We have a class
3 currently in the police academy,
4 which is scheduled to graduate in
5 June. And we are already filling
6 our next class to begin in July.

7 The chief and his staff
8 have done -- have made tremendous
9 efforts to recruit and to even
10 return police officers who had left
11 the Transit Police department during
12 the pandemic for other positions in
13 other departments, they are
14 returning. And we have lured in
15 other police officers from other law
16 enforcement agencies as well.

17 Law enforcement officers
18 now see SEPTA as an attractive place
19 to come and contribute to the safety
20 of our system.

21 We have really done --
22 we've introduced a virtual patrol
23 unit which uses the 30,000 cameras
24 we have in the system to monitor.

1 It's a force multiplier for our
2 officers on the ground to be able to
3 direct resources and to combat
4 things before they become an issue.

5 We've also introduced now a
6 Surface Transportation Unit. This
7 is a unit of dedicated officers and
8 leadership that are dedicated full-
9 time to buses and trolleys. So that
10 now we're not only patrolling the
11 subway systems and our rail network,
12 but we're out on the buses and
13 trolleys, also preventing incidents
14 from occurring there.

15 And when it comes to
16 employees. Employee assaults and
17 issues impacting our employees have
18 been a big problem, we've been able
19 to reduce those incidents in almost
20 half, 42%. So we have really made
21 tremendous strides to keep the
22 system safe.

23 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

24 And that was my follow-up

1 question because I know the
2 hardworking workers that work for
3 SEPTA, specifically under TWU, who
4 are on the front line day in and day
5 out. I know one of the sticking
6 points was public safety during the
7 negotiations.

8 Have we made progress with
9 putting, I guess, it's the glass --
10 the glass, bulletproof glass that
11 protects the actual SEPTA driver?
12 Give me an update on that. I did
13 see it in another country, so I want
14 to get an update on that in terms of
15 how we're doing.

16 And then also last, but not
17 least, and I'll wrap up before I
18 turn it over to my members. We talk
19 about the law enforcement component,
20 right, but as we address public
21 safety comprehensively, also talk
22 about -- well, give us an update --
23 I remember y'all rolled out an
24 initiative that deals with

1 behavioral health.

2 Individuals dealing with
3 drug addiction, right? Who are
4 basically utilizing our SEPTA
5 transit system, right, day in and
6 day out. But it's having a impact
7 on the quality of life for different
8 neighborhoods. But also, the actual
9 -- the person that's driving -- I
10 mean, the person that takes SEPTA
11 every single day. So give us an
12 update on that as well.

13 SEPTA GM MR. SAUER:

14 Certainly.

15 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

16 The customer is what I'm
17 getting at.

18 SEPTA GM MR. SAUER:

19 Certainly. So on the bus
20 enclosures. So we've had for many
21 years a bus enclosure that -- it was
22 really designed -- in the be -- in
23 the beginning we were trying to curb
24 some of this negative activity

1 customers on our employees, so we
2 put in a bus barrier that exists
3 today, but it's only a partial
4 enclosure. So it was it was it was
5 good at reducing the severity of
6 most instances, but what it did not
7 do is it did not fully encapsulate
8 the operator and it certainly was
9 not bullet resistant.

10 So what we have done we've
11 done a number of things what we call
12 our safer operator compartment
13 program. And it's the full cabin
14 enclosure, which is -- which is new
15 in this country, but we are going to
16 have an enclosure and we already
17 have a pilot bus running on the
18 system today that the operators are
19 testing for us. Where the operator
20 is now fully enclosed, ceiling to
21 floor, from the rear to the window.

22 This should prevent almost
23 every physical encounter that
24 they -- that they unfortunately have

1 to endure. Everything from the
2 hitting to the spitting, things
3 being thrown at them, that -- this
4 should take care of that.

5 What it doesn't do is
6 address shootings. As you know back
7 in 2023, we had a horrible horrific
8 shooting on our bus that result in
9 the death of --

10 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

11 We just had a shooting about two,
12 three weeks ago horrible on the bus
13 of a 15-year-old man young man so go
14 ahead.

15 SEPTA GM MR. SAUER:

16 Certainly. But speaking to the
17 operators safety, the TWU approached
18 us about -- about just under a year
19 ago with an idea to do bullet
20 resistant glass. They had a vendor
21 in mind that they could do it.
22 We've went through a variety of
23 testing. Most recently, we did the
24 ballistics test. It passed with

1 flying colors. So we are now moving
2 ahead with an enclosure that
3 includes this ballistics glass.

4 The biggest hurdle for us
5 to overcome was the weight. It adds
6 significant weight onto the front
7 axle of the bus, our engineering
8 staff has had to come up with some
9 solutions for that, but we think we
10 have it. So we'll have the first
11 bus done by the end of June. And
12 then we'll put seven more into
13 service soon after so that each bus
14 to garage has at least one bus to be
15 tested by the operators to ensure
16 that it fits their needs.

17 Chief Lawson, we've --
18 we've moved our behavioral health
19 initiatives into the police
20 department, so I'd like to ask Chief
21 Lawson to comment on some of that.

22 CHIEF LAWSON: Good
23 afternoon, Council President.

24 So you mentioned the SCOPE

1 program. The SCOPE program is an
2 acronym for safety, cleaning,
3 outreach, engagement and planning.
4 And that -- that program for us has
5 netted tremendous gains for us on
6 the system. That program remains
7 almost completely intact as it was
8 when it started. That program is
9 doing tremendous work and the
10 director is doing tremendous work on
11 bringing in --

12 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
13 Can you go in the numbers? Can you
14 go in the numbers? How many -- how
15 many people have been serviced under
16 the SCOPE program? And what type of
17 services did they receive treatment?

18 CHIEF LAWSON: Yep. So I
19 have some numbers for last year --
20 last year there were more than
21 142,000 engagements, there were --
22 the SCOPE team removed more than
23 120,000 people off the system that
24 were not interested in treatment or

1 violating our services in some
2 manner. More than almost 19,000
3 people were given resources of some
4 kind or another to help them out.
5 More than 12,000 referrals to other
6 agencies occurred in that program.
7 More than 280 Narcan deployments.
8 And they do tremendous work just
9 with our everyday problems, trying
10 to reduce smoking on the system and
11 things like that. They been a
12 tremendous help.

13 I do want to update Council
14 on just, and some of you have heard
15 this, in late 2024 our Office of
16 Inspector General conducted an audit
17 on the SCOPE program. And part of
18 that audit revealed some alarming
19 issues centered around the outreach
20 portion of that program. And so
21 essentially, they discovered some
22 waste and some fraud in those
23 contracts. And -- and we felt
24 obligated upon that discovery to

1 kind of suspend those contracts and
2 figure out a path forward to make
3 the most for our -- get the most for
4 our money.

5 I can tell you that -- that
6 we have revamped that SCOPE program,
7 we've embedded them now in the
8 police department. We have -- some
9 of the restructuring that we've done
10 has enabled us to hire now steady
11 supervision to monitor the
12 engagement activity of our outreach
13 workers in the field. We're
14 strengthening the onboarding
15 training of that group. So we're
16 putting a plan in place to have
17 better oversight and accountability
18 of our outreach contracts and we're
19 planning to reissue those contracts,
20 have those folks on SEPTA by July 1.

21 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

22 Okay. Well, thank you very
23 much.

24 Chair recognizes Councilman

1 Jim Harrity.

2 COUNCILMEMBER HARRITY:

3 Real quick. Just for the
4 information --

5 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

6 Jim, could you speak into the
7 microphone?

8 COUNCILMEMBER HARRITY: I'm
9 sorry. Just for informational
10 purposes, can you tell me who -- you
11 cancelled the contract for the SCOPE
12 program. Who was the provider?

13 CHIEF LAWSON: There were
14 two providers. One was NET,
15 Northeast Treatment Center, and the
16 other was Merakey. And Councilman
17 Harry, only one contract was
18 cancelled. Merakey is still under
19 contract.

20 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
21 Wait, time out. Pause. Time out.
22 So two contracts were cancelled for
23 fraud. Did I -- I heard that wrong?

24 SEPTA GM MR. SAUER: No,

1 sir.

2 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

3 Okay. Help me out.

4 SEPTA GM MR. SAUER: One

5 contract -- no, the waste -- the

6 waste.

7 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

8 The waste, not fraud, the waste.

9 SEPTA GM MR. SAUER:

10 Correct. The waste that was

11 discovered by the inspector general

12 caused us to pause -- pause services

13 while we re-engaged with Merakey.

14 Merakey is still under contract.

15 Northeast Treatment was terminated

16 for convenience so we parted ways.

17 And that was long before the

18 Inspector General's report was

19 surfaced.

20 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

21 Because the reason why I said pause

22 is because I know that as a city, we

23 have other contracts with these

24 agencies. So if they're engaging in

1 waste with one agency, then why
2 would we allow them to work with
3 other agencies? That's -- so I
4 wanted to do a -- I will follow-up
5 and do a deeper dive particularly as
6 it relates to Merakey and Northeast
7 Treatment -- Northeast Treatment.

8 Because if they're engaging
9 in waste and this is the Inspector
10 General's finding, then they
11 shouldn't be doing any business with
12 city of Philadelphia and engaging
13 any other contracts, at least from
14 my perspective. It's like being
15 under actual investigation in one
16 department, but you're still getting
17 to make money off the city in other
18 departments. And so, okay.

19 I want to start off with
20 the Chair of Transportation, then
21 the Majority Leader. Member Mike
22 Driscoll.

23 COUNCILMAN DRISCOLL: Well,
24 thank you, Mr. President. And

1 welcome, Chief, and welcome, Scott.
2 Good luck in your new
3 responsibilities. It's certainly a
4 unique time for you and for this
5 Commonwealth and for this city.

6 I think Council President
7 was spot on when he said that the
8 southeast is the economic engine for
9 the Commonwealth. So when you go up
10 there and you make your case to the
11 Republicans and the Democrats, you
12 let them know that this isn't a
13 Democratic issue, this isn't a
14 Republican issue. This is a
15 workforce development issue for us
16 to be continued as the economic
17 engine for the Commonwealth, which
18 we indeed are.

19 And they need to hear that
20 because the rest of the state
21 combined does not put in what the
22 Southeast puts in to the state
23 budget, as former State
24 Representative Kenyatta Johnson can

1 attest, and I certainly had my eight
2 years up there. And, you know, it's
3 not easy what you're about to do,
4 but it needs to be said. So I just
5 want to lead with that.

6 Not long ago SEPTA
7 announced that you authorized
8 services of a new vendor for the key
9 card fare product. And what I
10 wanted to know is the status of that
11 and how does that stand as it
12 relates to, you know, last week's
13 budget proposal?

14 SEPTA GM MR. SAUER: Sure.
15 So just a few months ago the board
16 authorized us to move ahead with our
17 second version of SEPTA Key. We
18 awarded that contract to Cubic for
19 the -- the total amount was \$211
20 million, and that includes the back
21 office and infrastructure.

22 And what this is an upgrade
23 of the current system, which is
24 about 15 or 16 years old now and it

1 has experienced failures. Our
2 customers will tell you that there
3 are days when the fare readers do
4 not work. There are days when they
5 can't load value onto their cards.
6 And we have discovered through a
7 variety of methods that we had to
8 recover revenue from our current
9 vendor in order to be made whole due
10 to system failures.

11 That's just a product of a
12 of a software system that has aged
13 out. By comparison, if your -- your
14 iPhone that you use, if you use an
15 iPhone, this would be the equivalent
16 of using your iPhone 4 in 2025. So
17 we are -- we are beyond that now at
18 this point and so it's time for an
19 upgrade.

20 So the \$211 million and
21 it's certainly a large figure and we
22 appreciate the people that
23 scrutinized it and it deserve that
24 scrutiny, but it will be spread out

1 over the life of the contract, so it
2 equates to somewhere around 15 to
3 \$16 million per year. And the
4 operating costs once we transition
5 from SEPTA -- from Key 1 to Key 2,
6 the operating costs will eventually
7 return to the same levels that they
8 are today.

9 There will be a brief
10 period in the middle where we're
11 running both systems concurrently
12 and the operating cost will elevate,
13 but soon it will return and we will
14 be fully in Key 2.0, and the
15 operating cost will be exactly the
16 same.

17 So where is it today? So
18 it is at its infancy right now.
19 They are still going through the
20 initial engineering and design, but
21 we -- customers will start to see
22 Key 2.0 where they can kind of see
23 it and touch it in about two years.
24 And that's about how long it will

1 take before we start to see kind of
2 how kind of things start to roll out
3 on the front end, all the back end
4 work is happening now.

5 COUNCILMAN DRISCOLL: And
6 how long is the contract?

7 SEPTA GM MR. SAUER:
8 Contract will take -- is projected
9 to take about six to seven years
10 total.

11 COUNCILMAN DRISCOLL: Okay.
12 And Mr. President, just another
13 question. What has SEPTA done to
14 generate additional funding on your
15 own and, you know, are you
16 maximizing your advertising income
17 or looking for other ways to make up
18 these funds?

19 SEPTA GM MR. SAUER: Yeah.
20 So thank you for that. Definitely
21 we -- we have increased on our own
22 as much revenue generation as we
23 can. So just -- just in the last
24 six -- six to eight months, we've

1 reinstituted parking fees at all of
2 our lots and garages, that's
3 generated an additional \$4 million
4 in new revenues that we did not
5 have. The fare increase which I
6 mentioned back in December was 14
7 million.

8 We are also trying to
9 maximize to our -- to the greatest
10 extent every resource we have
11 available for advertising. So we
12 have five of the -- we have five of
13 the six largest naming rights,
14 packages for station naming rights
15 with Jefferson, Wawa, I'm going
16 to -- I'm going to miss them all.
17 NRG. You know what I -- what I
18 mean, but our station naming rights
19 packages have been very advantageous
20 to us.

21 We have electronic
22 messaging now on our Silver Liner
23 Fives, electronic messaging on our
24 newest buses where we can place

1 advertising. And we are in the
2 process of developing smart
3 advertising where as the bus
4 traverses through the city it can
5 change depending on where it is, as
6 to what gets advertised. So we can
7 advertise local businesses, for
8 example.

9 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
10 I have a point of information.

11 SEPTA GM MR. SAUER: So
12 there's a -- so there's a number of
13 new --

14 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
15 I have a point of information.

16 SEPTA GM MR. SAUER: I'm
17 sorry.

18 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
19 And I'll let you continue. And
20 elaborate on some time ago, I
21 remember reading an article that
22 SEPTA sold certain properties at a
23 nominal cost to a particular
24 developer.

1 And it begs the question,
2 if we need money, then why would we
3 sell the property rights at a
4 nominal cost if we're trying to
5 generate as much revenue we need?
6 If we know this doomsday scenario is
7 coming -- and this is along the line
8 of questioning of generating
9 revenue.

10 SEPTA GM MR. SAUER: Sure.
11 So it's as much revenue generation
12 as it is cost savings to SEPTA. So
13 this -- so it's a very common
14 practice when in our case and it
15 certainly has happened in other
16 cases, the stations that -- for
17 example, the stations that I believe
18 you're referencing are in the
19 Germantown section of the city.
20 There were five stations. They were
21 in various states of disrepair, the
22 station buildings. And those
23 station buildings were costing SEPTA
24 about \$150,000 a year to maintain.

1 And that's just to keep them --

2 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

3 How much did we sell the land for?

4 The Chair recognizes

5 Councilmember Bass.

6 COUNCILMEMBER BASS: I'm

7 sorry, Scott, I just can't.

8 SEPTA GM MR. SAUER: I

9 didn't look this way.

10 COUNCILMEMBER BASS: Come

11 on now. You know these properties

12 are in Chestnut Hill and Germantown.

13 SEPTA GM MR. SAUER: Yes.

14 Correct.

15 COUNCILMEMBER BASS: And

16 so, yes. So it's not just

17 Germantown. This is -- this is some

18 of the most valuable real estate in

19 the city of Philadelphia and you

20 gave it away for a dollar. And you

21 all gave it away under a program

22 called a FASO. A FASO is finding a

23 special opportunity, F-A-S-O. And

24 so you found a special opportunity

1 which is essentially a hookup. So
2 call it what it is, it's a hookup.
3 You gave somebody a hookup, that's
4 what it is.

5 And so, you know, here we
6 are trying to figure out money to
7 keep this system running and at the
8 same time, you know, there's these
9 side deals which are making wealthy
10 people even wealthier. I ain't got
11 no problem with anybody making
12 money, that's okay with me. But at
13 the same time you can't come before
14 us asking for these very valuable,
15 very limited resources and at the
16 same time hooking up people that,
17 you know, that you want to hook up,
18 I'll just say.

19 And the fact that there was
20 no community participation, no
21 involvement from the neighborhood,
22 no say so in terms of what they
23 wanted to see. We gave away five --
24 you gave away five properties in

1 some of the most valuable
2 neighborhoods in the city of
3 Philadelphia for \$1 for 99 years.
4 Who doesn't want that deal? I'll
5 take that deal. Who doesn't want
6 that deal? Anybody? Like this is a
7 hookup so let's call it what it was.

8 Like I just, you know, I
9 just I couldn't sit and hear that it
10 was just something that was saving
11 SEPTA money. Because it's really
12 not a matter of saving SEPTA
13 \$150,000 a year when these
14 properties are valued at much more
15 than that. If you had put them on
16 the market and sold them, you would
17 have sold them for more than
18 \$150,000. A whole lot more. They
19 would have sold for -- I don't know,
20 a whole lot.

21 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
22 So for the record, Scott, I know you
23 have a response, could you just, for
24 the record, for the edifice of my

1 members, where are the five
2 locations located at regarding these
3 particular properties?

4 SEPTA GM MR. SAUER: So the
5 locations are Gravers, Mt. Airy,
6 Carpenter, Tulpehocken and Upsal
7 stations.

8 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

9 Okay. And in terms of the
10 arrangement, did we just sell it or
11 is it like an agreement where we get
12 some -- some revenue or profit from,
13 I guess it's a partnership or just
14 --

15 SEPTA GM MR. SAUER: So it
16 is -- it is a 99-year lease and the
17 developer agrees to lease -- agrees
18 to lease the stations it's a dollar.
19 And they agree to maintain the
20 stations and they're also going to
21 improve the station building for
22 some development, typically
23 commercial development.

24 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

1 So if they're doing, let's
2 say, high-end condos, do we get any
3 revenue off of it?

4 SEPTA GM MR. SAUER: So
5 the -- so -- so -- so these stations
6 are likely not that. They would
7 be -- they would be the -- the
8 revenue we're generating is the
9 recovery of costs that we would
10 expend to maintain the stations,
11 it's the \$150,000 a year.

12 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
13 It's \$150,000.

14 SEPTA GM MR. SAUER: And
15 that \$150,000 a year savings started
16 the day they signed the lease. And
17 there's also a capital improvement
18 that the developer will have to --
19 that has agreed to invest in the
20 stations totaling nearly \$4 million.

21 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
22 The Chair recognizes
23 gentleman -- councilmember Bass.

24 COUNCILMEMBER BASS: So I

1 just -- I just want to be clear on
2 what you're saying, which is not
3 that SEPTA is getting \$150,000 a
4 year. What is happening is that
5 SEPTA is just not putting out
6 \$150,000 a year and is basically
7 just giving away the property.

8 So you just gave it away so
9 you don't have to do the maintenance
10 on the property anymore. That's
11 what's happening here. I just want
12 to be absolutely clear so it doesn't
13 seem as if there's, you know,
14 resources coming back to SEPTA from
15 this transaction because there's
16 not.

17 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
18 Councilmember Thomas?

19 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: Why
20 didn't you just sell it?

21 SEPTA GM MR. SAUER: Well,
22 we still want the stations. They
23 still belong to SEPTA, we want to
24 use the stations. They're our

1 property.

2 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

3 Dr. Nina Ahmad?

4 COUNCILMEMBER AHMAD: So I

5 understand that you were leveraging

6 what you had without selling it, the

7 91. But there's always a very

8 robust revenue sharing model that

9 could have been used. Do you know

10 why it wasn't or when this happened

11 and under whose age this happened?

12 Because there's more -- is there a

13 clause for claw back? There's

14 different ways to handle this.

15 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

16 I would like to do this. I would

17 like to do this just to continue

18 managing. We're still on -- the

19 floor is still open to Councilmember

20 Mike Driscoll, Chair of

21 Transportation. And besides just

22 points of information, these lines

23 of questioning could be directed

24 when individuals are called. Just

1 want to maintain just some order on
2 the floor.

3 Member Driscoll, please
4 continue your line of questioning.

5 COUNCILMAN DRISCOLL: Thank
6 you, Mr. President. I'll save mine
7 for round two.

8 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
9 Okay. All right. The chair
10 recognizes Majority Leader Gilmore-
11 Richardson, then Councilman Jamie
12 Gauthier, who took the train today,
13 and then also Councilman Nicholas
14 O'Rourke, who took the train today
15 as well.

16 COUNCILMEMBER GILMORE-
17 RICHARDSON: Thank you. Thank you
18 so much, Council President. And
19 thank you to SEPTA.

20 I wanted to start with the
21 thank yous that we've done for every
22 hearing, then I have five questions
23 that I must get on the record.

24 One, I want to thank you,

1 Council President, for the
2 suggestion regarding SEPTA's senior
3 leadership engagement around
4 Harrisburg. As our Chair of
5 Transportation, Member Driscoll
6 stated, and our Council President,
7 who are both, you know, veterans of
8 the state house. It'll be important
9 that we have that level of
10 engagement directly from the
11 leadership team at SEPTA up in
12 Harrisburg. So I wanted to
13 underscore that matter.

14 In addition to that, we
15 want to thank Wendy Green-Harvey,
16 always responsive and collaborative
17 with members of City Council. Our
18 Philly own Fran Kelly and Pamela
19 McCormick. Also, the entire
20 Planning Department for their work
21 and collaboration on the bus
22 revolution. I know it was painful,
23 but I appreciate each and every one
24 of you.

1 To your board chair, Ken
2 Lawrence, I appreciate his work on
3 the bus revolution and just
4 everything SEPTA. And then also I
5 must give a shout out to Leslie
6 Richard, she was wonderful to work
7 with. And then TWU 234, and all of
8 our bus operators and those who work
9 on the system.

10 Scott, we're very happy for
11 you as well. Because you rose
12 through the ranks, very similarly
13 started as an operator and we
14 appreciate your institutional
15 knowledge that you bring in a moment
16 wherein it'll be important for SEPTA
17 in this moment.

18 So I have very quickly just
19 five questions. I'm going to give
20 you all my questions so I can get
21 them on the record.

22 One, SEPTA's Planning
23 Department, As I just notated, led
24 the way on a project titled Bus

1 Revolution. It was supposed to be
2 this comprehensive new bus network
3 that would yield more efficient bus
4 service.

5 I really appreciated all
6 the work that you all did and you
7 know slowing down the project and
8 working with us, so we could have
9 additional community engagement.
10 But considering the recent budget
11 crisis announcement, where does that
12 project stand?

13 And then next, I wanted to
14 talk about the impact for young
15 people because I think that was
16 lost. And at the most recent press
17 conference that was held by Senator
18 Saval and others, the students
19 spoke. And I was just struck
20 thinking about all the years that I
21 rode SEPTA to and from West Philly
22 to Philadelphia High School for
23 Girls. So what would be the impact
24 on the student fare card program?

1 And then additionally, for
2 youth impact, I want to talk about
3 current. How are you all working
4 with the Philadelphia Police
5 Department and our Department of
6 Human Services regarding curfew
7 enforcement on the line from a
8 safety perspective as well?

9 There have been a ton of
10 incidents as it relates to young
11 people. And we have Community
12 Evening Resource Centers where young
13 people can be taken to receive
14 resources if they're out past
15 curfew. So what are you all doing
16 around curfew enforcement on the
17 line? Because a lot of times when
18 things are happening like these
19 flash mobs and other things, young
20 folks run to the line. And I don't
21 know that there's any curfew
22 enforcement happening.

23 And then finally, because I
24 want to respect and honor the clock.

1 How are you all working with the
2 Office of Homeless Services? I
3 asked this question last year
4 regarding in particular the
5 dedicated beds, if any, for SEPTA.
6 But how you all interface directly
7 with the city's Office of Homeless
8 Services?

9 SEPTA GM MR. SAUER: Okay.
10 Okay. I think I have them all.

11 So let me -- let me start
12 with bus revolution. So we
13 appreciate the input that you gave
14 to Bus Revolution and everyone from
15 Council. So that's that project is
16 not done. It's paused pending the
17 outcome of funding.

18 COUNCILMEMBER GILMORE-
19 RICHARDSON: Okay.

20 SEPTA GM MR. SAUER: If
21 funding comes that -- we can take
22 that right off the shelf and begin
23 an implementation process that will
24 start with a broad communications

1 plan to educate our customers on the
2 changes prior to them taking effect.
3 But we should funding come, we could
4 begin implementation as early as
5 February of 2026.

6 COUNCILMEMBER GILMORE -

7 RICHARDSON: Okay.

8 SEPTA GM MR. SAUER: As
9 for -- as for our student fare
10 programs, that is a program that
11 that is funded -- is currently
12 funded by the state legislature or
13 state -- the state commonwealth. So
14 there's -- while the service may
15 cut -- may be cut, there's no --
16 there's no plan at this point to do
17 anything different with student
18 fares than what we currently do
19 today.

20 COUNCILMEMBER GILMORE -

21 RICHARDSON: Including the charter
22 buses?

23 SEPTA GM MR. SAUER: Well,
24 so that's different than -- that's

1 different than fares. So when it
2 comes to service, student -- so
3 service availability for students
4 would be impacted as harshly as it
5 would be for any other customer.

6 So the extra service, what
7 we refer to as our 400 series buses,
8 is what you might refer to as a
9 student charter, that would be
10 affected by cuts. The extra service
11 that we use to enhance the line --
12 the lines themselves to serve
13 different schools, they would see
14 cuts and reductions as well.

15 We've tried very hard very,
16 very, very, very much to reduce the
17 impact of the cuts in the first
18 round of cuts, the 20% reduction.
19 But once we start to cut deep like
20 we -- like we're proposing, it's
21 very difficult to maintain any real
22 semblance of frequent service for
23 anyone, including students. But
24 certainly that is not what we want

1 to do. We want to provide the same
2 levels of service, if not better,
3 than what we're -- what we're
4 currently providing today.

5 Chief, you want to take --

6 CHIEF LAWSON: Sure. So I
7 can tell you, I'm a huge fan and
8 proponent of the Community Evening
9 Resource Centers. I mean, it's a
10 tremendous tool for law enforcement
11 in this city.

12 I typically will bring that
13 group in to discuss that program
14 with my entire supervisory and
15 leadership team at least once every
16 year since I've been in charge of
17 the program in the police department
18 over here. That's a tool that we
19 can use to keep kids safe. Kids get
20 caught up in these flash mobs, like
21 you said. We have folks getting in
22 trouble and it doesn't have to
23 happen. We have a tremendous
24 working relationship with our

1 partners in this city.

2 I do I want to take the
3 opportunity at this point to really
4 thank Commissioner Bethel and his
5 team, particularly on their priority
6 to bring back, you know, the SEPTA
7 checks and helping direct
8 Philadelphia Police Officers check
9 our SEPTA transit operators and
10 things.

11 I can tell you that through
12 the first quarter of the year, they
13 have performed more than 8,500 of
14 those checks on SEPTA properties.
15 So that is a tremendous, tremendous
16 help to us and our -- our employees
17 certainly really appreciate that
18 that level of service.

19 But we coordinate on those
20 flash mobs frequently with sharing
21 of intel and collaborate a lot with
22 getting groups over to the CERC
23 centers. I love that program.

24 Office of Homeless

1 Services, the director of our SCOPE
2 program, Teresa White, has a
3 tremendous collaboration
4 coordination with them. They're in
5 communication virtually every single
6 week. As we bring back and remold
7 our SCOPE program, we're going to
8 have even more close coordination
9 with them. But right now, we're
10 relying on the Office of Homeless
11 Services and their homeless outreach
12 Contracts right now to kind of take
13 over the slack that we lost in the
14 suspensions of our contracts.

15 COUNCILMEMBER GILMORE-
16 RICHARDSON: Thank you, Madam Chair.

17 MADAM CHAIR BASS: Thank
18 you, Council Lady.

19 Next up is Councilwoman
20 Gauthier.

21 COUNCILMEMBER GAUTHIER:
22 Thank you, Madam Chair.

23 Good afternoon to the both
24 of you and thank you for everything

1 that you do to keep Philadelphia
2 moving, literally.

3 This morning Minority Whip
4 Nicholas O'Rourke and I, rode the L
5 from 52nd Street to City Hall, so
6 that we could ask riders about their
7 concerns and questions. I represent
8 the only Council District where a
9 majority of residents do not drive
10 to work. So for my communities in
11 West and Southwest Philadelphia,
12 riding SEPTA is not an option, it's
13 a necessity.

14 Something we often hear
15 from Senate Republicans is that
16 their taxpayers should not pay for
17 SEPTA because they incorrectly claim
18 their constituents do not benefit
19 from it. These lawmakers are
20 conveniently ignoring the fact that
21 our region is only 5% of the state's
22 land, but generates almost 40% of
23 the Commonwealth's tax revenue.

24 We know that Philly is the

1 economic engine for the entire
2 Commonwealth, so these Republican
3 transit cuts would sink Philly's
4 economy.

5 But can you talk about how
6 having reliable mass transit here in
7 Southeastern Pennsylvania supports
8 economic activity in other regions
9 of the state? Can you also talk
10 about how much funding SEPTA
11 receives from the Commonwealth
12 versus other large transit systems
13 in other states? So for instance,
14 do you receive more or less than
15 your peers?

16 And lastly, given SEPTA's
17 ongoing fiscal challenges, including
18 significant budget shortfalls and
19 limited state funding, how will
20 trolley modernization be impacted in
21 FY26?

22 SEPTA GM MR. SAUER: So
23 thank you for that. So let me --
24 let me discuss a little bit about

1 the impacts on the state. So
2 SEPTA -- while SEPTA certainly
3 operates in the five counties, parts
4 of Delaware, parts of New Jersey,
5 our reach across the Commonwealth is
6 far and wide.

7 The number of procurements,
8 the things that we buy everyday,
9 whether it's wheels or it's just
10 windshield wipers or cleaning
11 products, we stretch into every --
12 into many of the counties in the
13 Commonwealth.

14 So while we may not -- that
15 person that lives in Butler County
16 who's never taken a ride on a SEPTA
17 bus, there may be a company in
18 Butler County that we do business
19 with that they're benefiting from
20 the people that ride SEPTA everyday.

21 And I've made -- I've made
22 the same argument when I -- in some
23 interviews that I've done where I
24 say like, look, I've been -- I've

1 been to a lot of places, but I've
2 never been to some of the counties
3 in Pennsylvania, never ridden on
4 their roads or ridden on their
5 bridges, but I probably have
6 contributed to their maintenance.

7 So and -- and I don't
8 begrudge anyone, their road or their
9 bridge that they need to have, but
10 our people in the -- in this part of
11 the Commonwealth, they need mass
12 transit. We can't get around.

13 And I grew up in Southwest
14 Philadelphia and I rode the 13
15 Trolley to school and to work, my
16 first job. So I did those things
17 and I wouldn't have been able to
18 become the person I am without
19 SEPTA. So -- and I realize that our
20 customers by and large are in the
21 same situation that I was in many,
22 many years ago.

23 So -- so the impacts that
24 stretch across the Commonwealth,

1 while they may not realize it to the
2 point where they don't see value in
3 SEPTA. They will see the value if
4 we don't exist, and then they will
5 see the value.

6 COUNCILMEMBER GAUTHIER: I
7 think we should outline that for the
8 Republicans.

9 SEPTA GM MR. SAUER: I
10 agree with you. And to allay any
11 concern that Council may have about
12 my involvement in this process, I
13 have been front and center to anyone
14 who will listen to me in Harrisburg
15 and elsewhere. You know, myself,
16 lead -- trying to lead the way as
17 the leader of this organization, as
18 a leader in this community, I want
19 people to see my face when they
20 think about whether or not SEPTA
21 needs to be funded and hear my
22 voice. So I assure Council that I
23 am front and center on this issue
24 everywhere I go.

1 I'll bounce -- as it
2 compares to our peers, our funding
3 for peers, we are actually amongst
4 the lowest in the country when it
5 comes to funding as compared to the
6 largest transit agencies in the
7 country. We have a chart that I can
8 certainly share with Council, but
9 there's a chart that we use to kind
10 of talk about this, that we didn't
11 even create. It was actually
12 created by Chicago Transit Authority
13 to make their case for being under
14 funded. And we were worse than they
15 were.

16 COUNCILMEMBER GAUTHIER:
17 Wow.

18 SEPTA GM MR. SAUER: So
19 they did us a favor by creating a
20 chart where they ranked third from
21 the bottom, but we were at the
22 bottom.

23 COUNCILMEMBER GAUTHIER:
24 And how many -- how long was the

1 list?

2 SEPTA GM MR. SAUER: That
3 was a list of about 8 to 10 large
4 transit agencies in the country.
5 The highest being Seattle. They --
6 they had the highest.

7 And it's really, like
8 Seattle, for example, is building a
9 transit agency that to look like
10 what we are today. We have it.
11 They're spending billions of dollars
12 to create what we have. We don't
13 need billions of dollars to create
14 this system. We exist. We exist on
15 infrastructure that's exists today
16 and we need help. We need the
17 legislature to own SEPTA because we
18 are a product of the legislature.

19 As for trolley
20 modernization, the trolley
21 modernization project is still
22 progressing. The cars are in design
23 with Alstom, and so we are hoping to
24 have a mock up of the car that we

1 can display as part of 2026, when
2 the time comes, that we can show our
3 customers what this car will look
4 like in real life. They'll be able
5 to kind of touch and sit in it.

6 But the car is
7 progressing -- we are fully -- our
8 critical path items that we need to
9 bring the cars onto the property is
10 fully funded. So that includes our
11 Route 36, what we will now refer to
12 as T5. That line is fully funded so
13 that we can get that line in
14 operation. We can get the cars out
15 on the road to begin testing once
16 they arrive, which is still a couple
17 years away. But trolley
18 modernization is still -- is still
19 moving forward.

20 I'm sorry, was there
21 another question?

22 COUNCILMEMBER GAUTHIER:

23 That was it. Thank you so
24 much.

1 Thank you, Madam Chair.

2 MADAM CHAIR BASS: Thank
3 you, Council Lady.

4 Next is Councilman
5 O'Rourke.

6 COUNCILMEMBER O'ROURKE:
7 Thank you, Madam Chair.

8 Good afternoon, everybody.

9 SEPTA GM MR. SAUER: Good
10 afternoon.

11 COUNCILMEMBER O'ROURKE:

12 Thank you for the hard work
13 that you all put in everyday to
14 maintain our city's lifeline. I
15 want to start by talking about the
16 Zero Fare program. The Zero Fare
17 program, the Mayor's office has
18 announced that the plan to continue
19 the SEPTA Key Advantage for city
20 employees, which is great news and
21 is "in discussion" with SEPTA to
22 extend the Zero Fare program through
23 FY26.

24 Many of us are happy to

1 hear that Zero Fare is safe for
2 another year. We have heard it
3 across the city, we have heard it
4 certainly here, and so that is
5 exciting news.

6 I do have a few questions
7 about this, though. Could you share
8 more about where those discussions
9 stand currently? Will Zero Fare
10 actually be funded at current levels
11 through the end of FY26?

12 SEPTA GM MR. SAUER: So
13 that is the commitment that we
14 continue Zero Fare as it is today.
15 So the same program with no -- with
16 no additional limitations. We are
17 still working out what that looks
18 like with the administration, but
19 SEPTA is supportive of the program.

20 We have no objection to
21 moving the program forward. In
22 fact, we saw the value in it
23 immediately. So that it was -- it
24 had a goal of about 25,000 users, it

1 met that goal. So we're -- we're
2 excited that the administration
3 wants to continue it and we're you
4 know we're eager to kind of nail
5 down what it -- what it's going to
6 look like.

7 COUNCILMEMBER O'ROURKE: So
8 the discussions continue as it
9 relates to what that looks like.

10 SEPTA GM MR. SAUER: Yes,
11 that's correct.

12 COUNCILMEMBER O'ROURKE:
13 What we've been told is that the
14 funding plan for Zero Fare in FY26
15 is to take funds already committed
16 to SEPTA and restructure them to pay
17 for the program. If I'm
18 understanding this correctly, the
19 city actually increased the subsidy
20 to SEPTA by about 15 million in
21 FY24. And that we're essentially
22 restructuring that that extra 15
23 million to fund Zero Fare.

24 Can you confirm that this

1 is correct?

2 SEPTA GM MR. SAUER: So
3 what the administration did is they
4 overmatched their commitment to
5 SEPTA. And what they did is they
6 based their matching funds on what
7 the governor's proposal was for
8 SEPTA, not what we actually
9 received. So in essence, they have
10 paid us more than they were
11 obligated to pay because they
12 committed to the proposal that the
13 governor made. And so they're --
14 they're ahead of the game as it
15 stands today and they're considering
16 using those funds to fund the Zero
17 Fare program.

18 COUNCILMEMBER O'ROURKE:
19 Okay. And still and I heard the
20 bell, so I'm going to get off the
21 clock. But to make sure I have this
22 straight, we are going to be using
23 funding that we were already
24 planning to give to SEPTA and

1 restructuring that, so to also pay
2 for the administrative overhead for
3 the Zero Fare program.

4 Wouldn't that mean -- if
5 that's the case, wouldn't that mean
6 that SEPTA is actually receiving
7 less money now as a result?

8 SEPTA GM MR. SAUER: Not
9 yet. The governor's proposal is not
10 passed.

11 COUNCILMEMBER O'ROURKE:
12 Okay.

13 SEPTA GM MR. SAUER: So not
14 yet.

15 COUNCILMEMBER O'ROURKE:
16 I'll come back in the second round.
17 Thank you.

18 MADAM CHAIR BASS: Thank
19 you, Councilman.

20 Councilman Harrity.

21 COUNCILMEMBER HARRITY:
22 Thank you, Deputy Whip.

23 Hello. How is everybody
24 doing today? I'd like to get a

1 little bit more into the SCOPE so I
2 can understand. Because I actually
3 am a fan of the program. I have
4 examples here where people have
5 gotten into Merakey and have been
6 successful, one for eight months
7 already and one for five.

8 So but what I would like to
9 get into is you said that they were
10 -- the contracts were paused, right,
11 because of the Inspector General's
12 report.

13 Can you elaborate on that a
14 little bit more and kind of tell us
15 some of what the report showed?
16 Because from what I understand it
17 was that there may have been a
18 little bit of padding going on with
19 the numbers and how many people they
20 actually services compared to what
21 the number really was. So could you
22 please just get into that a little
23 bit for us?

24 SEPTA GM MR. SAUER: Sure.

1 And just let me just -- let me also
2 be clear, we're a fan of the program
3 as well. It has been -- it has been
4 an enormous success for us in being
5 able to reach people in a non-law
6 enforcement way to get them the help
7 that they -- that they so need.

8 So what -- what I want to
9 kind of try to clarify a little bit
10 is the Inspector General's report,
11 so there's -- there's -- there's
12 still discussions going on. So the
13 way the Inspector General measured
14 contacts with folks who need help
15 may not have been crystal clear and
16 what that -- and you probably know
17 this better even than I do.

18 So making contact with
19 someone who is in need is a process
20 that these outreach specialists have
21 to -- have to earn the trust of the
22 people that they're trying to offer
23 help to.

24 So contact with someone in

1 this regard may look like a lot of
2 different things. It's not just
3 direct physical or verbal contact
4 with that person. It could just
5 simply be being near them to give
6 them the sense that this person is a
7 friendly.

8 So I think that there are
9 some things that we still have to
10 hash out as to what an engagement
11 looks like. But by and large, what
12 we've done on per SEPTA is we're
13 going to own this.

14 And the Chief alluded to
15 this, that we're going to add
16 supervisory personnel of our own
17 from our roles that will take some
18 ownership of supervising the
19 outreach specialists. Making sure
20 that whatever is being reported is
21 100% accurate, something we can
22 verify. So that -- so that should
23 we do should we look into this again
24 at a later date, we all agree on

1 what the a contact is and how to
2 measure it.

3 I don't want to in any way
4 mislead anyone that we weren't
5 concerned about it. We were, which
6 is why we paused operations. We
7 want to make sure that we have this
8 set up in such a way that people
9 can't question it as something
10 that's not productive.

11 So Merakey is still on
12 board. Northeast Treatment, we
13 separated ways before the report was
14 issued. But the pause was just out
15 of an abundance of caution to make
16 sure that we have our act together
17 before we re-engage.

18 COUNCILMEMBER HARRITY: Are
19 there still investigations going on
20 related to this?

21 SEPTA GM MR. SAUER: Just
22 at this point I wouldn't determine
23 it as an investigation. It's
24 conversations around the report on

1 the investigation.

2 COUNCILMEMBER HARRITY: So
3 what you're saying is what they were
4 trying to get at is trying to make
5 it clear of what a contact actually
6 is like. So they couldn't just say
7 if they gave them water --

8 SEPTA GM MR. SAUER:
9 Correct.

10 COUNCILMEMBER HARRITY: --
11 that was a contact.

12 SEPTA GM MR. SAUER: If we
13 report 50 contacts, we want to make
14 sure we made 50 contacts.

15 COUNCILMEMBER HARRITY: So
16 do we. So and I appreciate it. And
17 like I said, I'm a fan of the
18 program. I have talked to numerous,
19 you know, I'm in recovery, I'm open
20 about it. I've talked to people in
21 the program that have gotten in,
22 actually, I couldn't believe it,
23 through your program and Merakey.
24 So I was a little concerned when I

1 heard the report about the Inspector
2 General and some other things going
3 on, and wanted to try to get some
4 clarification.

5 So I thank you on that, but
6 we'll definitely be keeping an eye
7 on not just you guys for the program
8 continuing, but also the people
9 providing the service. So that we
10 know that the service is being
11 provided. That's important.

12 SEPTA GM MR. SAUER: I
13 appreciate that.

14 COUNCILMEMBER HARRITY:
15 Thank you.

16 MADAM CHAIR BASS: Thank
17 you, Councilman.

18 Council -- Chair recognizes
19 Councilwoman Lozada. But before you
20 go, I do have a couple of questions
21 that I want to put before SEPTA
22 before we leave today.

23 And that is I would like a
24 list in the last two years how many

1 FASOs, the Finding A Special
2 Opportunity, that SEPTA has done?
3 How many of these deals? How much
4 were the contracts? To whom did
5 they go to? And were there
6 minorities/women who were a part of
7 these transactions? And the length
8 of the leases?

9 SEPTA GM MR. SAUER: We'll
10 get that for you.

11 MADAM CHAIR BASS: Today?
12 Can we have it today before we wrap
13 this up?

14 SEPTA GM MR. SAUER: Yes,
15 we will try our best to get that.

16 MADAM CHAIR BASS: Super.
17 thank you so much. Thank you.
18 Councilwoman Lozada.

19 COUNCILMEMBER LOZADA:
20 Thank you, Madam Chair.

21 Thank you for being with us
22 this afternoon. Let me start off by
23 saying that I appreciate everything
24 that you all have done to try to

1 figure out how to make the system
2 cleaner and safer.

3 I'm baffled, though,
4 because we still have a long way to
5 go. And so my question is -- I
6 don't have to tell you what the
7 issues are in the transit stops
8 along the 7th Council District, you
9 know what they are, you're familiar
10 with them. My question is now that
11 Mr. Divers has retired, how do you
12 all plan to manage the safety and
13 the cleanliness and the removal of
14 some of our unsheltered population
15 on our systems?

16 He was the point of
17 contact, right? And it didn't
18 matter if we called them on a Sunday
19 morning or a Friday late evening, he
20 was responsive. It can't be Wendy.
21 It can't be Wendy. Wendy is one
22 person, right? And so who is your
23 outreach person? How do we respond
24 to this?

1 I have staffers who use the
2 transit system everyday and every
3 morning is a different story about
4 someone lighting up a crack pipe
5 next to their children, right? With
6 no response from SEPTA Police even
7 after multiple reports.

8 And so I need to figure
9 out, we're preparing for 2026 and
10 we're saying that we're going to be
11 ready. We can't -- we're not ready
12 now for our own residents. So what
13 are you going to do? How do we
14 respond? Who's the point of contact
15 person?

16 CHIEF LAWSON: So you're
17 right, Ken Divers has now retired.
18 His second in command is now the
19 interim director of our SCOPE
20 program. If you don't have her
21 information, we'll make sure that
22 you get it so she's available
23 anytime that you need her. You can
24 always reach out to me. I'll

1 address anything that needs to
2 occur.

3 I do want to share, I mean
4 we've made significant progress
5 through the Kensington corridor.
6 And so I mean across every measuring
7 statistic that we're measuring crime
8 is down, cleanliness is up,
9 engagements are up, enforcement is
10 up more than 200%, you know, through
11 that corridor. We're doing more
12 collaboration with the city than we
13 ever have.

14 And I absolutely agree that
15 a lot more needs to be done, right?
16 Like this is an issue, it's one of
17 those issues that SEPTA and that our
18 Police department cannot solve
19 alone. I can't create more housing
20 opportunity, I can't get people
21 clean myself, so I need to work we
22 need to work through other
23 individuals in that.

24 Theresa is a tremendous

1 support for me. She now -- I talked
2 about embedding the SCOPE program
3 within the Police Department. She's
4 a member of my command staff now.
5 She has not only the resources that
6 she has in the SCOPE program, she
7 has availability of the entire
8 resources of the Police Department
9 at her disposal.

10 COUNCILMEMBER LOZADA: So
11 to some people in this legislative
12 body those numbers matter, but to me
13 what matters most is the people that
14 are using the system. Right?

15 And my community is telling
16 me that it is not reliable, that it
17 is not safe and that it is not
18 clean. And so I need -- I can
19 connect with you, I can call you,
20 but what do my residents who, you
21 know, some people depend on the
22 system to work, like my colleague
23 has mentioned. My residents depend
24 on it to survive, right? Because

1 they don't have the luxury of
2 vehicles.

3 And so I need -- I need to
4 know, you know, that when they're
5 using that app that somebody's going
6 to respond. We see officers up on
7 the -- on that platform and people
8 are evading pain and they're just
9 standing there. Right? People are
10 using, openly injecting themselves
11 at the steps of our SEPTA stations
12 and there's officers at the foot of
13 the steps, and they're just
14 watching.

15 And so I need -- I need
16 some real solutions. I need you to
17 help me believe that No. 1, visitors
18 coming into our city in 2026 are not
19 going to walk away seeing this in my
20 community. And No. 2, that you are
21 going to not have one Mr. Divers,
22 but three, four, five of them
23 because that's what we know we need.
24 Right?

1 And the problems are not
2 just in my district, while my
3 district is ground zero for these
4 problems, I'm sure on 52nd Street,
5 54th Street, all of these other, you
6 know, stations have the same problem
7 and so we need more Mr. Divers And
8 more serious concrete solutions to
9 how are we going to do this?

10 What do we do -- how do you
11 better partner with the Police
12 Department? How do you better
13 partner with offices like mine? How
14 do we put real solutions in the
15 hands of residents that depend on
16 the system? Because I'm not hearing
17 that, I didn't read it in your
18 testimony and we talk a lot. And,
19 yeah, it all sounds amazing, but I
20 have -- I don't see us making
21 progress in my district.

22 SEPTA GM MR. SAUER: So
23 what I -- what I can -- what I can
24 commit to at this point is we have

1 Teresa, who took Ken Diver's place.
2 We are adding supervisors, as we
3 mentioned to this program, so we
4 are -- we are multiplying the force
5 that could be available.

6 But I certainly would like
7 to, you know, I'd like to figure out
8 what -- what else is needed. We've
9 thrown a lot of resources at our
10 cleaning operation. I realize that
11 that may not be completely visible
12 to you in your district. So I'd
13 like to figure out what is -- what
14 else is necessary that I can really
15 make an impact.

16 I heard you on Monday, you
17 talked about this very same issue
18 for 2026. That you don't want to be
19 a viral video. I don't want that
20 for you either, I don't want that
21 for this city. So if I can -- if
22 there's a way that we can
23 collaborate in a more meaningful way
24 than we have been, then I'm open to

1 it. I'm open to figuring out
2 precisely what it is that that
3 your -- your constituents need to
4 feel safe riding SEPTA because
5 that's what we want.

6 We have a number of
7 initiatives underway to combat fare
8 evasion we can certainly talk
9 through that when the time is right.
10 But -- but specifically to your
11 concerns, there's got to be a way
12 now that we can -- we can battle
13 this together and I'm willing to do
14 that.

15 COUNCILMEMBER LOZADA: How
16 many of your -- I'm sorry, Madam
17 Chair.

18 How many of your -- I don't
19 know your board, right? How many of
20 your board members are professional
21 transit folks? Understand transit,
22 can speak to transit, can come up
23 with policy around transit, can
24 create recommendations around -- how

1 many of your board members are
2 prepared for that?

3 SEPTA GM MR. SAUER: I
4 mean, our board is a very engaged
5 and professional board. I would say
6 there's a mix of professions on the
7 board.

8 COUNCILMEMBER LOZADA: I
9 want to know transit specific. And
10 this is why I'm asking this. There
11 is no way that the decisions that
12 have been made up to now are being
13 made by people who understand
14 transit oriented policies,
15 legislation, conversation,
16 fundraising. Like I can't
17 understand -- I'm not a transit
18 person and so I'm just trying to
19 figure out, who do you have guiding
20 you in this process?

21 SEPTA GM MR. SAUER: I
22 would say my board has been
23 instrumental in guiding me up to
24 this point. I've been in the job

1 just a few months and they have been
2 a big help to me.

3 Like I said, there's a
4 variety of professions that I can
5 lean on from professional engineers
6 to lawyers, it's a mix. I wouldn't
7 say -- I am -- I like -- I liken
8 myself and my team, the team that
9 works around me, we are the
10 professional -- transit
11 professionals. The board gives me
12 guidance and helps me make good
13 decisions. And I feel like --

14 COUNCILMEMBER LOZADA: I
15 don't doubt that. I don't doubt
16 that. And I'm not -- I'm not -- I'm
17 not putting your board down. I'm
18 not saying that they're not good
19 people, I'm just saying that that
20 have a foundation in transportation,
21 that has a foundation in transit
22 oriented policy.

23 SEPTA GM MR. SAUER: Yeah,
24 I can't speak -- speak specifically

1 to their complete backgrounds. I
2 know what their professions are.

3 COUNCILMEMBER LOZADA: I
4 get it.

5 SEPTA GM MR. SAUER: But I
6 I would have to defer that question
7 to someone on the board.

8 COUNCILMEMBER LOZADA: And
9 I think that that's where we need to
10 look at. That's what we need to
11 look at, right? It's good that they
12 can that -- that they are
13 professional and that they're good
14 people and that they're committed
15 and they believe in transit systems.
16 I get it. But if they don't have
17 the knowledge, it's almost like me
18 walking in being on your board and
19 telling you what you need to do in a
20 transit system when I have no clue
21 --

22 SEPTA GM MR. SAUER: Sure.

23 COUNCILMEMBER LOZADA: --
24 what it even takes, right? And so I

1 just -- I'm just going to recommend
2 that we -- that we just look at that
3 because I think it's common sense,
4 right?

5 Thank you, Madam Chair.
6 I'm not trying to start no trouble.
7 I'm not trying to start no trouble.
8 I'm just saying, right? Y'all
9 asking me -- it's like me telling
10 you what to do and I have no idea
11 because I -- my major was in HR and
12 in management, right?

13 MANAGING DIRECTOR CARROLL:
14 So good afternoon,
15 Councilmember Lozada. Mike Carroll,
16 deputy managing director for the
17 Office of Transportation and
18 Infrastructure here in the city and
19 I'm also a SEPTA board member.

20 So I can't answer your
21 question much more specifically than
22 Scott has. There's a couple of us
23 who have transportation backgrounds.
24 There's a few who work in law

1 related issues that are directly
2 connected to SEPTA's work.

3 So labor, for example.

4 Risk and liability, for example. So
5 there's a breath of professional
6 expertise the board provides. I
7 think, you know, the best way for us
8 to kind of get you the comfort that
9 I think you need is for the board to
10 reach out to Councilmembers, such as
11 yourself and Councilmembers, in
12 general.

13 You know, there's a decent
14 amount of engagement with Council
15 President, but we can expand that
16 and you can get to meet these folks
17 and have some facetime with them and
18 share some of your concerns and get
19 them of their feedback.

20 I will say that coming out
21 of the pandemic, the board has tried
22 to articulate a message where I
23 think Scott, I'm sorry, the interim
24 general manager has really picked up

1 on that there's a need for
2 constantly elevating the sense of
3 customers and workers safety and
4 security.

5 And I have been asked to
6 lead a subcommittee that focuses on
7 safety in particular, specifically
8 the operation is, you know, one that
9 has a lot of hazards associated with
10 it, a little bit less on the
11 customer side.

12 But there's also an
13 emphasis on accountability and I
14 think the general manager has put a
15 ton of focus on accountability. And
16 that is about building a culture in
17 the organization given that, you
18 know, the people who worked for
19 SEPTA, like everybody else in the
20 region, has been through a lot in
21 the last few years. And these are
22 our residents. They're not people
23 who appear from Mars and run trains
24 and buses and, you know, they're

1 just kind of showing up out of thin
2 air.

3 They live in our
4 neighborhoods, you know, they --
5 they -- they work here, they shop
6 here, their kids go to school here.
7 So they have an investment, but
8 trying to raise that culture is
9 something that the board is focused
10 on. And I think it would be very
11 healthy for the board to share
12 insights and ideas with
13 Councilmembers in order to get that
14 perspective and I think you're
15 getting that.

16 COUNCILMEMBER LOZADA: I
17 think that would be great and I
18 would appreciate that. However,
19 again, right, I want us -- I want --
20 we are -- we're saying that we're in
21 a critical -- and Madam Chair, I
22 know that I'm over time, but we're
23 in a critical situation right now
24 where we're talking about I think I

1 read 50 lines going to be cut by
2 2026. And we're talking about in
3 the same year where we're having a
4 ton of people coming into our city
5 and we're talking about relying on
6 public transportation, right?

7 And so I -- you know, we
8 have to at some point become a
9 common sense government, right? And
10 we need people leading conversations
11 that are prepared to lead those
12 conversations in a very effective,
13 responsible way. The transit system
14 needs to be clean, it needs to be
15 safe, it needs to be reliable.

16 And if that means I'm gonna
17 focus just on the Market-Frankford
18 line right now, and I'm going to
19 give it a 100% and make it reliable
20 and make it clean and make it safe.
21 You have to do that before I decide
22 that I'm going to use your system.
23 It can't be the other way around,
24 right?

1 You can't continue to cut,
2 cut, cut, be less reliable, and then
3 expect me to want to use you. We
4 have to do this the other way. And
5 so I'm just saying we need to figure
6 it out.

7 MANAGING DIRECTOR CARROLL:
8 I appreciate that.

9 COUNCILMEMBER LOZADA:
10 Thank you, Madam Chair.

11 MADAM CHAIR BASS: Thank
12 you very much, Council lady. And I
13 agree with you a thousand percent.

14 Because if we're having
15 this, you know, very difficult
16 conversation about cuts to SEPTA and
17 about, you know, who's going to lose
18 service and, you know, what's going
19 to be drawn back. And, you know,
20 it's going to dramatically affect
21 the entire city of Philadelphia.

22 And so when we make
23 decisions, you know, going -- going
24 back to, you know, my concern

1 earlier about giving away, you know,
2 five very valuable properties for a
3 dollar for a hundred years. When we
4 make a decision like that it really,
5 kind of, like makes you scratch your
6 head and say, you know, who is
7 making these kinds of decisions that
8 are affecting all of us.

9 It's not just, you know, a
10 group of people. It's affecting the
11 entire city of Philadelphia. And
12 when we don't have the right
13 professionals on the boards, you
14 know, or connected and making
15 decisions at SEPTA, again, it
16 affects us all, and it's very much
17 of concern.

18 Any information available
19 yet on those demographics?

20 SEPTA GM MR. SAUER: We are
21 getting it, Councilmember.

22 MADAM CHAIR BASS: Okay.
23 And one other question on the bus
24 revolution. I think you mentioned

1 to Councilwoman Majority Leader
2 Kathy Gilmore-Richardson, I think it
3 was her that asked about it. And
4 you said part of it was paused.

5 SEPTA GM MR. SAUER: So the
6 entire new bus network is paused
7 pending the outcome of our funding
8 situation.

9 MADAM CHAIR BASS: So what
10 does that mean?

11 SEPTA GM MR. SAUER: So the
12 reason why that is -- so we can't
13 move forward with implementation
14 when we're talking simultaneously
15 about stripping service away. So
16 new bus network was not a reduction
17 in service, it was to take our
18 existing resources and make them
19 more efficient and more useful to
20 our customers. To create, in fact,
21 more frequency and more reliability
22 for customers.

23 We would have to do a -- we
24 are going to have to do a

1 communications campaign to educate
2 our customers on what this new bus
3 network is going to look like.

4 MADAM CHAIR BASS: Right.

5 SEPTA GM MR. SAUER: We
6 could have that conversation at the
7 same time we're talking about
8 stripping away up to 50 bus routes.

9 MADAM CHAIR BASS: How much
10 have we spent on the bus revolution
11 so far?

12 SEPTA GM MR. SAUER: Well,
13 it would -- so what we've spent so
14 far and I don't have the precise
15 figure, but it would have been
16 really consultant and staff time up
17 to this point because it is
18 generally resource neutral, so I
19 will have to get you that figure.

20 MADAM CHAIR BASS: And the
21 other question I have on the bus
22 revolution is that when we change
23 bus routes and bus numbers and
24 names, and all that, we were told it

1 was because it was confusing. And
2 so I'm trying to find out what the
3 confusion was?

4 SEPTA GM MR. SAUER: So I
5 think more so than it's confusing --
6 so it certainly wouldn't be
7 confusing to locals. Because people
8 like you and I, who've been here for
9 our entire life --

10 MADAM CHAIR BASS: Right.

11 SEPTA GM MR. SAUER: -- we
12 know what the G is.

13 MADAM CHAIR BASS: Correct.

14 SEPTA GM MR. SAUER: But
15 what we were trying what the what we
16 were trying to do with the new
17 nomenclature is to create a system
18 that is good and understandable for
19 locals and visitors alike, for both
20 the frequent and the infrequent
21 user.

22 So -- so when we -- as we
23 shifted and we adopted a letter -- a
24 letter naming system naming

1 convention for our rail lines, we
2 are shift making sure that all the
3 bus routes take a numerical naming
4 convention. So of the six or seven
5 bus routes that were remaining that
6 still had letters, we shifted almost
7 all of them to numbers to coincide
8 with the other 115 or so bus routes
9 that are also numbers. That was to
10 give it more consistency across
11 mode.

12 MADAM CHAIR BASS: So if we
13 made a decision to make that sort of
14 a change, to change letters to
15 numbers, so that it would be more
16 understandable for people who are
17 not from Philadelphia, for visitors.
18 So we essentially made these changes
19 to make it easier for visitors to
20 understand, rather than the people
21 who ride and pay for SEPTA every
22 single day and who take this
23 transit.

24 Because for the life of me

1 I just don't understand what was
2 confusing about our system.
3 Especially when, you know, like the
4 XH, the H, the R, the -- you know,
5 like all of these bus routes. You
6 know, even from back in the day the
7 C bus, right? SEPTA changed the C
8 bus. You know what people still
9 call it? The C bus. And so who are
10 we making these changes for?

11 SEPTA GM MR. SAUER: And
12 again, it -- so -- so just to give
13 it give some historical perspective,
14 the C bus changed and, yes, there
15 are still some leftovers who still
16 call it the C bus. People like us.

17 MADAM CHAIR BASS:
18 Everybody calls it the --

19 SEPTA GM MR. SAUER:
20 People -- there are still people who
21 refer to our regional rail lines as
22 the R -- R5, R4, R3, rather. So
23 there traditions die hard sometimes,
24 but at the same time I can also

1 remember bus routes -- I remember
2 bus routes because I've been here so
3 long that other people don't recall
4 because it has changed and now
5 everybody knows the new.

6 So it's not just new just
7 for the sake of being new and it
8 wasn't just intended for the -- for
9 the visitor. It was just meant to
10 make sure it was consistent that
11 this mode was treated this way. The
12 bus mode was treated this way, the
13 rail mode is treated this way. The
14 same way we now refer to our transit
15 rail lines as our metro.

16 It just it feels new and
17 the newness makes it feel confusing,
18 but in time people will grow
19 accustomed to the new nomenclature.
20 Some won't, but many will. And the
21 new -- the new folks who come in who
22 enter the system, whether they're
23 now children or infants growing into
24 the system or they're visitors or

1 people relocating into the city,
2 they won't know it any other way.

3 MADAM CHAIR BASS: I hear
4 you. I think that -- and I'm not
5 going to belabor the point. But I
6 think that whatever time and
7 resources we spent on this could
8 have better been used to try to
9 figure out the financial situation
10 of SEPTA rather than changing the R
11 to the you know Route 49 or, you
12 know, like whatever it is.

13 SEPTA GM MR. SAUER:
14 Understood.

15 MADAM CHAIR BASS: I just
16 don't think that that was probably
17 the best use of our time and talent
18 and treasury, you know, for SEPTA or
19 for trying in public. Because if
20 we're making all these changes and
21 the idea is to make someone who
22 visits Philadelphia once a year, you
23 know, at the expense and the, you
24 know, confusion of those who have

1 been riding SEPTA for a lifetime, it
2 just doesn't make sense. But like I
3 said I don't want to belabor that.

4 Chair recognizes
5 Councilmember Anthony Phillips.

6 COUNCILMEMBER PHILLIPS:

7 Thank you, Chairwoman Bass.

8 SEPTA -- just a couple questions.
9 SEPTA is has capital projects that
10 they're responsible for. In our
11 district two capital projects SEPTA
12 is responsible for include the Fern
13 Rock district, there was supposed to
14 be an underpass or overpass.
15 Lawndale, there's supposed to be a
16 new overpass or underpass. And
17 there has been community
18 conversations about this for about
19 way before I even started.

20 When I first started on
21 Council, I had meetings about this
22 in 2022 and now it's 2025. And then
23 to learn that former Councilwoman
24 Cherelle Parker had projects with

1 the, you know, that were slated to
2 be working in her office and so
3 forth.

4 We're now going close to
5 it's about six years now it looks
6 like and the capital project still
7 has not started. To me it's
8 disappointing because I look up and
9 I'm like, oh, are we moving on it
10 and nothing's moving. But it's more
11 disappointing to a community that
12 SEPTA continues to engage about this
13 and there's no construction
14 happening.

15 So even before the death
16 spiral there was funding that was
17 earmarked for capital projects in
18 our district. And I'm trying to
19 figure out what is the status of
20 those type of those capital projects
21 and is SEPTA becoming more like
22 Rebuild Philadelphia in our Parks &
23 Rec where they're constantly not
24 finishing parts -- you know, capital

1 projects.

2 Thankfully, Rebuild is
3 getting stuff done now, but before
4 they weren't. It looks like
5 SEPTA's, you know, doing the same
6 model.

7 SEPTA GM MR. SAUER: Sure.

8 And let me speak to those two
9 projects in particular, and then
10 I'll talk a little bit about the
11 capital program generally.

12 So both Fern Rock and
13 Lawndale are both in consideration
14 for executing the project. Fern
15 Rock has been particularly
16 challenging because the solution is
17 not apparent. There -- there
18 were -- there was discussions about
19 a crossover, there were discussions
20 about an underpass.

21 The engineering associated
22 with both options and the underpass
23 does not seem like a viable option.
24 But certainly the overpass, the

1 engineering associated with that
2 doesn't present an easy remedy for
3 that location to be able to do this
4 project. That's not to say that it
5 wouldn't ever happen, but there's
6 still a lot more that has to be done
7 before we get to a real viable
8 solution for Fern Rock.

9 Lawndale is a little bit
10 different. While we had an
11 engineered project, the funding was
12 not there. So we -- we -- when we
13 had we had applied for a grant from
14 the Federal Railroad Administration,
15 it didn't come. It's still on the
16 books as a project that we want to
17 execute, it's just the funding just
18 has not presented itself for that
19 project.

20 We -- we -- it had never
21 been funded at least during the time
22 that I've been paying attention to
23 the project. But -- but more
24 broadly, our capital program is

1 sorely under funded. We still have
2 a \$5 billion backlog of state of
3 good repair. We have a \$17 billion
4 12-year program that we can only
5 fund about 14 billion of, which
6 includes trolley modernization,
7 station accessibility. Rail car
8 replacements.

9 We have the old -- we still
10 have the oldest rail car fleet in
11 the country and our 50-year-old
12 Silverliners are unfunded to be
13 replaced.

14 So we would love to build
15 anything that -- that will make our
16 customers experience better. We
17 want to make our stations fully
18 accessible. That's -- that's a
19 priority for the organization.
20 We've had to -- we've had to delay a
21 couple station accessibility
22 projects because we just don't have
23 the funding to move forward.

24 Now there's a variety of

1 reasons for that. Number 1, we
2 don't get the funding levels -- as
3 Councilmember Gauthier pointed out,
4 we don't get the funding levels that
5 our peers do. But just as
6 important, we don't -- inflation has
7 taken a bite out of our capital
8 budget as well. So there's a number
9 of reasons why these projects don't
10 always get over -- get started,
11 those are just a couple.

12 COUNCILMEMBER PHILLIPS:

13 But Scott, I understand that, but
14 it's the process, right?

15 SEPTA GM MR. SAUER: Yes.

16 COUNCILMEMBER PHILLIPS:

17 The community is not understanding,
18 neighbors aren't understanding if
19 you're going to take our time, bring
20 us out to meetings on multiple
21 occasions, and then we do know that
22 there's a grant that's pending.
23 It's like why even put us through
24 that until you have all your marbles

1 in the book?

2 Right now, that entire
3 community engagement team in my mind
4 has literally had meetings in our
5 district over and over again with
6 nothing to show for at this point.
7 And it's disappointing to -- it's
8 disappointing not only to myself,
9 but to our neighbors. So I just
10 think our process just has to get
11 better with the capital project
12 side.

13 And not only that, the
14 follow-up is not really good either.
15 Because even after a meeting there's
16 not like, hey, we're going to be
17 getting here. We're still in
18 design, still in design. So it's
19 just the process that I'm concerned
20 about.

21 SEPTA GM MR. SAUER: Yeah,
22 and I appreciate that. And as -- as
23 your -- your colleagues have -- have
24 pointed out in other -- in other

1 aspects of the way we do business,
2 we do have to do better at
3 communicating with you, with your
4 constituents, with the people of the
5 region, and our processes internally
6 for evaluating these projects as
7 they're presented to us has to
8 improve as well.

9 We have to -- and all those
10 things are in motion. I want to
11 assure the Council that those things
12 are happening. We've -- just in the
13 few months that I've -- that I've
14 been general manager, we've put
15 already put in a number of processes
16 to try to, No. 1, right size our
17 capital program. And then secondly,
18 make sure that we have a process for
19 selecting projects before we come to
20 the community --

21 COUNCILMEMBER PHILLIPS:

22 Yes.

23 SEPTA GM MR. SAUER: -- and
24 ask them for their approval and

1 their input.

2 COUNCILMEMBER PHILLIPS:

3 Yes, yes. Have the funding ready to
4 go and have a process of when we're
5 going to finally say we got to make
6 time, especially with the Fern Rock
7 one.

8 Just, last question. The
9 bus operators are -- the bus
10 operators and the railroad
11 operators, the operator, they are
12 your No. 1 staff people. I'm
13 thinking about their safety as
14 operators. And one of the things
15 I'm thinking about is that the
16 ongoing number of young people who
17 they're young, things happen, they
18 get on the bus after school and they
19 also get on the bus during the
20 regional rail -- they get on
21 regional rails, the train, excuse
22 me, the subway.

23 Is there a way in which
24 this budget could potentially

1 reflect people that could be --
2 could be supportive of the bus
3 operators during this time helping
4 to communicate with schools. You
5 know, there's traditional bus stops
6 that all the -- all of the young
7 people congregate at. We could have
8 people out there as a safety
9 precaution helping to funnel in kids
10 into those buses only of certain
11 limits and so forth.

12 And I'm just thinking about
13 like also having a police department
14 for school, SEPTA police, always
15 around during those let out times.
16 I feel like they're just there, and
17 then that just -- and they could be
18 over -- there could be people that
19 could be hired just to help
20 deescalate the congregation that is
21 at these traditional spaces.

22 Are we thinking more
23 innovatively about how to help to
24 make sure that we're not having too

1 many kids on buses, too many kids on
2 trains, but also helping to
3 deescalate situations having staff
4 members work on that from as part of
5 a safety project.

6 CHIEF LAWSON: So I
7 think -- I think COVID, kind of,
8 really put us behind the eight-ball
9 in this in that the number of
10 operators that we had on the street
11 were fewer and far between, which --
12 which meant service was impacted
13 which meant more people getting on
14 buses.

15 I think a couple of the
16 programs that we implement now is
17 like, you think I think about school
18 trip programs where we're
19 communicating directly with the
20 schools and providing trip or
21 service directly from a school to a
22 particular transportation center. I
23 think that helps.

24 Our collaboration with the

1 city is fantastic with, sort of,
2 problem hotspot locations. We kind
3 of know where they are. We do
4 supply police officers off of the
5 line and out at these hotspot
6 locations, particularly where we
7 know there's been historical
8 problems. We're tracking that as
9 new hotspots come online.

10 I think all of this is
11 going to be alleviated as our as our
12 staffing gets better and our service
13 count gets better and the number of
14 fleet vehicles get better.

15 COUNCILMEMBER PHILLIPS:
16 Are you in constant communication
17 with school principals and leaders
18 about needs at bus stops because
19 that could be really helpful.

20 CHIEF LAWSON: We do. So I
21 have my commanders essentially is
22 similar to district level commanders
23 all have school safety meetings that
24 they attend. We have a tremendous

1 working relationship with school
2 police. So we're communicating
3 every week when school's in service
4 with school police as well.

5 COUNCILMEMBER PHILLIPS:

6 All right. Thank you. Hopefully
7 that answers it.

8 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

9 Thank you.

10 Councilmember Young.

11 COUNCILMEMBER YOUNG: Thank
12 you, Mr. Chair.

13 Just one question. Could
14 you talk to us about, you know, if
15 the level of funding you're seeking
16 from the state doesn't come through,
17 how will you utilize the
18 Stabilization Fund in order to keep
19 SEPTA afloat? Can you talk to us
20 about what that fund is?

21 SEPTA GM MR. SAUER: Sure.

22 Thank you. Yes. So the Service
23 Stabilization Fund has had many
24 names over the years, none of which

1 are completely accurate.

2 The Service Stabilization
3 Fund is its proper name. And what
4 it is in reality is a working
5 capital fund. So we use that fund
6 every single day to do business. We
7 pay -- we pay our contractors for
8 capital projects, we pay salaries,
9 we -- we pay for variety of
10 procurements and other needs out of
11 this fund. So the value of the fund
12 fluctuates from -- throughout the
13 year. It reaches its highest point
14 typically on the last day of the
15 fiscal year which is June 30th.

16 As it stands today the fund
17 sits at just over 200 million. We
18 will dip into that fund for about
19 \$13 million to close the remainder
20 of the fiscal 26 budget after all
21 the cuts are made. So even though
22 it's a \$213 million deficit, we will
23 we will cut the 45%, we will raise
24 the fares, and then we will still

1 dip into the fund for \$113 million
2 to close out the remaining gap.

3 What that does is it leaves
4 us with less than a month's
5 operating expenses left to conduct
6 daily business. And what that could
7 eventually lead to if we exhaust
8 that fund is we would then start
9 using debt to pay for things. Much
10 like anyone else might use debt when
11 they run out of money, which will
12 incur higher fees, higher charges
13 for us to do business in addition to
14 the rising costs that we already
15 deal with.

16 So the Stabilization Fund
17 has been mischaracterized as a rainy
18 day fund or an emergency fund,
19 something that just kind of sits off
20 in the bank somewhere and waits for
21 us to use it. That's not -- that's
22 not at all what it is. We use it
23 everyday.

24 COUNCILMEMBER YOUNG: Thank

1 you. And you rely on -- you do
2 business in a lot of counties in the
3 state. Have you -- or what type of
4 effort have you made with those
5 contractors you have to help you
6 leverage their legislators in that
7 part -- in that part of the state?

8 SEPTA GM MR. SAUER: Yeah.

9 So we have engaged with all of our
10 vendors and contractors and
11 consultants to let them know that
12 should SEPTA have to enact this
13 budget, that they would in turn see
14 reductions in us being able to
15 execute contracts with them.

16 We've encouraged them to
17 reach out to their legislators,
18 we've even shared this information
19 directly with legislators who
20 represent these districts or
21 these -- these counties. So that
22 they are aware that while we may
23 spend \$5 million in your county
24 today, we cut half the budget and we

1 cut half the workforce, that \$5
2 million could be zero. it could be
3 a little bit more, but likely would
4 be zero.

5 So we have encouraged all
6 of our vendors to engage. We've put
7 them on notice as to what could
8 happen as the same is true of their
9 of their representatives as well.

10 COUNCILMEMBER YOUNG: Thank
11 you.

12 COUNCILMEMBER PHILLIPS:
13 Thank you. Councilmember Dr. Nina
14 Ahmad.

15 COUNCILMEMBER AHMAD: Thank
16 you, Council President. Thank you
17 all for being here. Congratulations
18 on your appointment.

19 I wanted to ask about your
20 board composition. So we --
21 Philadelphia is expected to
22 contribute about 135 million while
23 our surrounding counties are asked
24 for about 30 million combined.

1 While there might be some
2 discrepancy around who actually
3 utilizes SEPTA, the most city
4 residents or suburbanites, the
5 rationale for the city's
6 disproportionate investment into the
7 authority is that the city stands to
8 benefit from a fully funded
9 operational SEPTA service.

10 However, the ten county
11 appointed SEPTA boards, only two are
12 from the city and our suburban
13 neighbors have overwhelmingly more
14 collective representation than the
15 city has.

16 Has SEPTA ever seriously
17 considered a reconstruction of its
18 board so it is reflective of the
19 central role the city plays in its
20 operations and strategic planning?

21 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
22 That's good.

23 COUNCILMEMBER AHMAD: We
24 contribute the most to the authority

1 because we ostensibly have most to
2 gain, however, we have totally
3 unequal representation at the
4 highest levels of decision within
5 the authority.

6 MANAGING DIRECTOR CARROLL:

7 So I'll take this one on
8 and I just wanted to jump in because
9 it's not -- those questions are not
10 questions that the general manager
11 or the staff or leadership of SEPTA
12 really are involved in at all.

13 The fundamental reason why
14 the board is structured the way it
15 is because of the authorizing
16 legislation which is state
17 legislation. And since the state of
18 Pennsylvania setup SEPTA, that's how
19 they define the board structure.
20 There are conversations individual
21 board members have about what the
22 appropriate structure would be. But
23 the board itself doesn't even have
24 the power to reconstitute its -- its

1 representation. That would have to
2 be done by the state legislature.

3 So in that vein, I would
4 really appreciate when the lobbying
5 is done with the -- with our state
6 legislature to actually highlight
7 the disproportional, you know,
8 participation that is, you know,
9 that we do from Philadelphia. And
10 the fact that, you know, we are
11 helping keep this afloat at a great
12 cost to us when we are one of the
13 poorest big cities in the -- in the
14 country.

15 The second thing I wanted
16 to ask about the board was about
17 my -- my colleague Quetcy Lozada
18 asked about people with experience
19 on about transportation planning.
20 My question is about development
21 because we just heard about the
22 99-year leases without any sharing
23 of revenue, potentially, which we'll
24 get more information. But that's a

1 real -- a solid pathway for us to be
2 able to amplify. And I wanted to
3 know who on the board has and is
4 maybe giving you support on that
5 issue? And how these deals were
6 structured?

7 And then finally, the final
8 lead up question is that when we
9 have this type of authority, you
10 know, doing this kind of work we
11 need to make that value proposition
12 to the state about what is the
13 actual investment from Philadelphia,
14 not just direct, but indirect and
15 what is it doing for the entire
16 state. That would -- we need a like
17 a graphic to show that. So I'll
18 take your answers.

19 Thank you, Council
20 President. I'll just listen to the
21 answers.

22 SEPTA GM MR. SAUER: So it
23 was mentioned earlier that we have a
24 board -- we have a board

1 subcommittee that advises us on
2 safety and security. We also have a
3 similar board subcommittee that
4 advises us on real estate
5 transactions.

6 So that -- the makeup of
7 that subcommittee is there's a
8 variety of board members that are
9 either assigned to or attend. The
10 chairperson of that committee is
11 Commissioner Marian Moskowitz of
12 Chester County, and then there are
13 other board members. And we can
14 certainly supply that list to you,
15 but they advise us on real estate
16 transactions.

17 COUNCILMEMBER AHMAD: And
18 they were the people who authorized
19 the 99-year leases that you did in
20 Northwest Philadelphia?

21 SEPTA GM MR. SAUER: The
22 subcommittee doesn't authorize, they
23 advise. The entirety of the board
24 authorizes. They vote collectively,

1 the 15 members.

2 COUNCILMEMBER AHMAD: Okay.

3 And my -- I forgot what my other

4 question --

5 SEPTA GM MR. SAUER: Oh,

6 I'm sorry. I didn't hear the second

7 --

8 COUNCILMEMBER AHMAD: Long

9 question. Oh, about a real graphic

10 showing the state what is our

11 investment in SEPTA.

12 SEPTA GM MR. SAUER: Oh,

13 we -- we do. We share that. 100%

14 we share Philadelphia's investment

15 in SEPTA versus the state investment

16 versus the county investment. And I

17 will say in fairness to the

18 counties, like Philadelphia, they

19 have all committed their share.

20 Even like Philadelphia has,

21 they have committed their share

22 based on the governor's proposal.

23 And so -- so I didn't want to -- I

24 didn't want to insinuate anything

1 negative about the county
2 commitment, they are committed to
3 SEPTA as well. But certainly
4 Philadelphia because of its size
5 commits much more.

6 COUNCILMEMBER AHMAD: And
7 so just to make the point to the
8 governor and the legislature that
9 what -- the revenue we generate for
10 the rest of the state, that's a
11 graphic we would like to have
12 because we can be advocates for all
13 of you here. And then all the --
14 all the voters who live in
15 Philadelphia, the largest county,
16 who will, you know -- you know,
17 determine the fate of statewide
18 officers is very important for us.
19 So we would like that piece of
20 information.

21 SEPTA GM MR. SAUER: We
22 have an economic impact analysis
23 that we conducted based on the cuts
24 that reveals that information.

1 We'll make sure that you have that.

2 COUNCILMEMBER AHMAD: Thank
3 you. Thank you, Council President.

4 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
5 Thank you.

6 Councilmember Jones.

7 COUNCILMEMBER JONES: Thank
8 you, Mr. President. And thank you
9 and congratulations on your
10 appointment.

11 SEPTA GM MR. SAUER: Thank
12 you. I remember with the competent
13 Wendy going through the bus
14 revolution -- did I say competent?
15 Highly competent Wendy going through
16 the bus revolution, and I warned at
17 some of the hearings certain things
18 that I'm going to repeat today.

19 That every time we shorten
20 a route, there's a senior that has
21 to walk further. Every time we
22 eliminate a route, there's a kid
23 that has to navigate through
24 neighborhoods that he may or may not

1 know that cause him danger. Every
2 time we change the names of a route,
3 we tend to confuse people who know
4 to catch this bus, to get that bus
5 to get to my doctors.

6 So what I said in the bus
7 revolution was: Have we talked to
8 institutions that deal with the
9 University of Penns of the world,
10 the other large institutions that
11 service those populations, school
12 district, how this is going to
13 impact them.

14 And I understand it's a
15 doomsday and God knows that I know
16 that there are people working at the
17 state as we speak trying to figure
18 out where the quarters in the couch
19 are to pay for this deficit. And
20 you got a governor working for you,
21 you got a state house working for
22 you and we need to work on the rest.
23 You have a Council that wants to
24 work with you. But when you punish

1 the people who are trying to help
2 you, it just gives us a very bad
3 taste in the mouth. If it's a kick
4 in our butt to motivate us, we are
5 motivated. Trust us.

6 But we cannot have people
7 who work the night shift eliminated
8 from work because they no longer
9 have a means back and forth. Now
10 having said that, no good crisis --
11 in Chinese, they say the same word
12 for crisis is the same word for
13 opportunity.

14 We should not waste this
15 crisis because we should be
16 revamping, tweaking where we can to
17 make it more efficient. Example is
18 when we went through the whole piece
19 with the Sixers Arena. We should
20 take that as an opportunity to see
21 how we can help make successful
22 trips from suburbanites, who want to
23 take public transportation down to
24 the stadium, how to get express

1 party L's, buses from Fern Rock from
2 69th Street to be able to go there
3 and have a Sixers mascot on there,
4 so that they can feel safe.

5 We should be working with
6 our state counterparts to say where
7 would they park at 69th Street?
8 Where can they use the mall that --
9 we need to logistically put those
10 things in place now so that we
11 increase our ridership today. God
12 help us if we actually get some help
13 from the state, you are in a better
14 position to more effectively plan
15 for a better future for this system.

16 In 2026, we're going to
17 need you like at full strength, not
18 at half strength. We need to have
19 these systems in place so that
20 visitors can park at Fern Rock and
21 ride in. Park at 69th Street and be
22 on a party safe transit system. And
23 feel welcomed like a -- I'm not
24 going to go with New York or DC, but

1 some of those other cities kind of
2 have the perception that they have
3 right.

4 What I will agree with you
5 wholeheartedly on, we do have the
6 best veins and infrastructure of
7 most transportation cities. Better
8 than Denver, better than some of
9 these other places that are trying
10 to get to where you already are. We
11 just need to build on that. Thank
12 you, Mr. President.

13 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

14 Thank you.

15 And I'd like to tell a
16 story how when I was in -- I was in
17 Ohio, Cleveland, I was part of an
18 organization called City Year and we
19 had our synergy in Cleveland, Ohio.
20 And their Delaware waterfront is
21 similar to what we -- their Delaware
22 riverfront would be called The
23 Flats, right? And that's where we
24 had our conference at. And we were

1 all leaving in the evening and we
2 missed our bus, right?

3 Curt, we were in the middle
4 of nowhere right. And it dawned on
5 me how important SEPTA was because
6 that was the last -- that was the
7 last bus. Like there was no bus
8 after that, right? Like that was
9 it, right?

10 And it made me appreciate
11 SEPTA cause I'm from South Philly.
12 And we got -- I got the Broad Street
13 line and we used to have the C,
14 which it changed to another bus, but
15 it's still the same bus on Broad
16 Street. So I have the option to
17 catch the bus or the sub. And then
18 the 2 bus going north and south.
19 And then on 19th Street and 20th
20 Street, the 17, which is the best
21 bus route in the city, right, that's
22 going from north and south. Right?
23 And then I think we just eliminated,
24 but we also had a bus on 23rd Street

1 which was the 7, right? And that's
2 just going north and south. But
3 that's just getting started. But
4 also, the 29, east and west. The
5 64, east and west.

6 And so once I learned that
7 I got left that night in Cleveland,
8 it was dark, too.

9 COUNCILMEMBER JONES: It's
10 a whole another experience.

11 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
12 It was dark, too. It made me
13 appreciate. So, you know, we're not
14 going to let these cuts happen. So
15 not going to happen.

16 COUNCILMEMBER JONES: So to
17 the President's point, we have to
18 defend your riders and we will do so
19 vigorously. We love Wendy, but that
20 ain't going to be enough to stop us.

21 SEPTA GM MR. SAUER: We
22 don't want you to stop,
23 Councilmember.

24 COUNCILMEMBER JONES: All

1 right. Thank you, Mr. President.

2 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

3 Thank you. So I guess as
4 we go into our next round. I got
5 you, sir. Council -- well,
6 Councilmember Thomas.

7 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: This
8 is my first --

9 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
10 First?

11 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: Yep.

12 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
13 Okay.

14 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: Good
15 afternoon. I'm trying to go -- I'm
16 going to go rapid fire. A couple
17 questions.

18 Have you talked about the
19 economic impact on um the entire
20 region so have we -- have we
21 communicated how much revenue we
22 expect the Commonwealth of
23 Pennsylvania to lose if some of the
24 recommendations from the governor

1 are not adopted. And what is that
2 specific amount?

3 SEPTA GM MR. SAUER: So yes
4 we have and we have an economic
5 impact analysis that is on our
6 website currently. We're sharing
7 that with everybody. And what
8 this -- what it costs in tax
9 revenues alone is about \$675
10 million.

11 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: So
12 we would -- the Commonwealth of
13 Pennsylvania would lose about \$675
14 million in tax revenue?

15 SEPTA GM MR. SAUER: That's
16 right. And that's direct tax
17 revenue, this doesn't mean that has
18 property tax loss and all the other
19 things.

20 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: I
21 understand exactly what you're
22 saying.

23 SEPTA GM MR. SAUER: Right.

24 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS:

1 Council President

2 recommended earlier that you go to
3 Harrisburg yourself. Your thoughts
4 on that?

5 SEPTA GM MR. SAUER: I --
6 absolutely -- I've already been
7 three times. I got three more trips
8 coming in the next couple weeks.

9 So, yes, I have a place in
10 Harrisburg now, yes.

11 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: I'll
12 volunteer to go up there with you
13 one day as well, so you're not going
14 by yourself, so you can see members
15 from Philadelphia. And I bet other
16 members of City Council would also
17 volunteer to go out with you, as
18 well as advocates. I would
19 recommend that we make it an entire
20 Philadelphia initiative.

21 I think what Council
22 President -- it's important that
23 they see you early and often, but I
24 do want to volunteer to make sure

1 that you have support systems and
2 people have your back, so I'll put
3 myself in that category.

4 There's been a lot of
5 advocacy on social media, but
6 SEPTA's website, SEPTA's social
7 media pages are not necessarily as
8 active as say some of the
9 Councilmembers who rode in the L in
10 today. Are there any plans, yes or
11 no, to improve SEPTA's social media
12 presence to help improve your
13 advocacy efforts?

14 SEPTA GM MR. SAUER: Yeah.
15 I mean our entire communications
16 effort is -- is improving. We -- we
17 -- I think the effort we've made
18 thus far has been -- has been
19 yoeman's work. This has been our
20 concentration, so yes, but we do
21 have to do more on social.

22 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: When
23 I get on the train or the L and my
24 bus is late or my train is late, or

1 even if it's not going to come, is
2 there a way that I can just go to
3 SEPTA's social media page to be able
4 to get an update on what's happening
5 with my particular means of
6 transportation?

7 SEPTA GM MR. SAUER: So the
8 social media page isn't as helpful
9 as our app is.

10 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: We
11 need the social media page.

12 SEPTA GM MR. SAUER: Yeah,
13 the social media page will help you
14 in certain ways. But if you want
15 specific information about your
16 specific bus or your specific train,
17 the app is the best bet. We you can
18 actually track the movement of the
19 vehicle as it arrives to you.

20 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: So
21 the reason that we need the social
22 media page is because we're going to
23 have a lot of people coming to
24 Philadelphia. And you have a lot of

1 corny people like me who just don't
2 download apps. I don't download
3 apps. I don't have Uber or any of
4 those type of apps on my phone. I'm
5 not an app person.

6 So you can't expect people
7 to adjust to you. We have to meet
8 people where they are. So I'm going
9 to ask that we find a way to allow
10 social media to provide the same
11 updates that apps do.

12 My last thing I want to say
13 thank you to you, a special thank
14 you to Wendy, the entire team at
15 SEPTA. We appreciate you
16 participating in the 2020 hearing,
17 as well as the other work that you
18 do. SEPTA -- two questions and I
19 won't come back for a second round.

20 SEPTA, as far as marketing,
21 how much revenue do you generate
22 from people marketing on your buses
23 and on your trains? How much
24 revenue is that?

1 SEPTA GM MR. SAUER: 14

2 million.

3 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: How

4 can you get that number up to 28

5 million? You can give us that

6 answer in writing. I don't even

7 want to put you on --

8 SEPTA GM MR. SAUER: We can

9 certainly try.

10 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS:

11 Yeah, I don't want to put you on the

12 spot like that. But we -- let's get

13 a little more creative in marketing.

14 I see you partner with people to be

15 able to get naming rights to certain

16 stations. We see marketing and

17 advertising on buses, sometimes on

18 the side, sometimes on the front.

19 Let's see if you all get

20 can get creative in the next couple

21 weeks before we pass a budget and

22 come back to us on ways that you can

23 increase the amount of revenue you

24 get from marketing and selling

1 naming rights and things of that
2 capacity.

3 Last, but not least, I
4 heard one of my colleagues bring up
5 board members SEPTA board members.
6 How many SEPTA board members are
7 Philadelphia residents who've been
8 approved by Philadelphia elected
9 officials to serve as board members?

10 SEPTA GM MR. SAUER: There
11 are two Philadelphia representatives
12 on the SEPTA board.

13 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: And
14 how many total people are on the
15 board?

16 SEPTA GM MR. SAUER: There
17 are 15 total.

18 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: So
19 13 out of the 15 people on the board
20 are not Philadelphia residents. And
21 if I'm not mistaken, 15 out of 15
22 were not confirmed by anybody in
23 Philadelphia, correct?

24 SEPTA GM MR. SAUER: I

1 can't speak to the resident because
2 there are those that are appointed
3 by the state legislature.

4 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: All
5 of them are appointed and approved
6 by the state, right?

7 SEPTA GM MR. SAUER: No.
8 Well, no, Philadelphia appoints its
9 two representatives.

10 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: Two,
11 right?

12 SEPTA GM MR. SAUER: Yes,
13 but the state legislature house and
14 senate appoint their own
15 representatives, some of whom may be
16 Philadelphia residents. I don't
17 know that.

18 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: So
19 when you go to Harrisburg, and I'm
20 wrapping up right here, Council
21 President. When you go to
22 Harrisburg and you advocate for
23 SEPTA funding, is there any
24 consistent reminder that the people

1 who are on the board were appointed
2 by them and that they should be the
3 primary funders for SEPTA? Because
4 they appointed the board members,
5 they have jurisdiction, they are
6 constitutionally responsible for
7 funding SEPTA? Is that ever a
8 conversation up there?

9 SEPTA GM MR. SAUER:

10 Listen, I can -- I can honestly say,
11 Councilmember, our board is very
12 active in this fight. They have
13 accompanied me --

14 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

15 Can I do a point of information --

16 SEPTA GM MR. SAUER: Sure.

17 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

18 Just for clarity on the process and
19 just coming from me working up there
20 and I'm sure Driscoll can attest.
21 Half of this argument is preaching
22 to the choir, right? And a lot of
23 the ones who are blocking us aren't
24 so much from the board, it's more so

1 Republicans from across the state of
2 Pennsylvania that no matter what we
3 do.

4 So you'll get a Republican
5 from Bucks County to be supportive
6 of our efforts, but you won't get
7 that Republican from Allegheny
8 County to be supportive of our
9 efforts. Just wanted to clarify --
10 clarify it just in terms of process.

11 But Member Thomas still
12 wants his answer so make sure you
13 respond to his question, but I just
14 want to clarify because I know the
15 dynamics of what we're dealing with.

16 Member Thomas?

17 SEPTA GM MR. SAUER: Yes,
18 sir.

19 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS:
20 Yeah, I just think -- and I think
21 it's more of a rhetorical thing. I
22 just think it's somewhat
23 hypocritical for a legislative
24 branch of government to have

1 appointed authority over any type of
2 institution, but then not own the
3 responsibility of funding it.

4 Right?

5 I think that that's so
6 hypocritical and I think it's very
7 disappointing that we've moved to a
8 space in a place where something
9 like SEPTA which should be a
10 bipartisan issue. Right?

11 It's not like you have to
12 show your registration when you get
13 on SEPTA and only Democrats can ride
14 SEPTA. Everyone rides SEPTA. And
15 it's unfortunate that this has
16 turned into such a partisan issue
17 especially when those same people
18 who Council President is saying they
19 have a history of blocking the
20 funding are the same people who vote
21 for and appoint the governing body
22 that's in charge of this large
23 transportation -- go ahead,
24 President.

1 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

2 Yeah, I just wanted to be clear,
3 just in terms of transparency and
4 how that that process work. The
5 people who are actually blocking
6 don't lose SEPTA. The people who
7 have the power right now who's not
8 passing the three bills that came
9 out of the house of the general
10 assembly to get passed, they can
11 care less about the city of
12 Philadelphia. Because they focus on
13 bridges and roads, that's their
14 interest, because SEPTA doesn't have
15 an impact on the immediate
16 community.

17 And so that's where the
18 power lies right now and that's
19 where the rub is in terms of trying
20 to get them to be more supportive of
21 our efforts. So just want to
22 clarify that, for the record.

23 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS:

24 Thank you, Council President.

1 So I'm hoping that when we
2 go to Harrisburg, those same folks
3 that the Council President is
4 talking about will be the people who
5 is on the top of our list to go
6 visit. And I'm more than willing to
7 have a respectful conversation along
8 with you and other legislators to
9 figure out what do we do to address
10 this crisis.

11 I'll submit the rest of my
12 questions in writing, Council
13 President. Thank you.

14 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
15 Thank you. And also supporting
16 Member Thomas and this approach,
17 also with the support of the
18 Chairman of Transportation who's a
19 former member, Driscoll, who's well
20 versed in this area. It's also
21 going to take, and I'm sure you know
22 this already, Scott, right? When I
23 talk about working in partnership
24 with the Chamber of Commerce.

1 And so having a real
2 conversation the Philadelphia
3 Chamber of Commerce doesn't just
4 represent Philadelphia, a majority
5 of members come from the surrounding
6 regions. They have a -- they have a
7 strong Republican candidacy that's a
8 part of the chamber.

9 And so I've seen things
10 move as a former member when need be
11 when the other side of the aisle
12 actually go to Harrisburg and make
13 this an actual priority. I've seen
14 them stop things from happening when
15 they want to make things a certain
16 priority. And so we have to be
17 very, very strategic and pragmatic,
18 but also speak truth to power and
19 making sure those who have a vested
20 interest aren't just doing rallies.

21 Because the rallies are
22 cute and come out, hey, let's go.
23 But the reality is how are you
24 actually getting it done? And a lot

1 of it is behind the scenes having
2 direct conversations, pushing and
3 pulling, and at the same time
4 strategically getting people to get
5 to be where you need to be in terms
6 of really supporting Governor
7 Shapiro's budget that he's put forth
8 with \$300 million. How much would
9 come to the city of Philadelphia?

10 SEPTA GM MR. SAUER: About
11 168 million.

12 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
13 And 168 million. And we've passed
14 how many bills out of the general
15 assembly to the Senate which they
16 have never supported? How many?

17 SEPTA GM MR. SAUER: Three.

18 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
19 Three. And so there lies the
20 politics that we have to address in
21 terms of making sure that we support
22 SEPTA.

23 The Chair recognizes
24 Councilmember Quetcy Lozada for a

1 point of information.

2 COUNCILMEMBER LOZADA: Just
3 a point of information. I want to
4 be clear, right, I'm not -- I'm not
5 downing the people of SEPTA's board
6 or I'm not saying that they're not
7 professional or supportive of you.

8 I think that the point that
9 I'm trying to drive is that if
10 people who are not well-versed and
11 prepared and understand the transit
12 system and everything that comes
13 with it to be able to make
14 effective, responsible decisions for
15 it. It can get us to where we are
16 right now, right?

17 And so just want to make
18 sure that, that's really what I'm
19 pushing is that we may have amazing
20 people on SEPTA, they just may not
21 be capable of making transit
22 oriented decisions and that's why we
23 are where we are.

24 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

1 Okay. Well, I have confidence in
2 the Chair, a gentleman by the name
3 of Ken Lawrence, he's a Fels
4 University of Pennsylvania graduate,
5 along with myself part of Fels
6 alumni group who's taking the helm
7 now. And so we'll be supporting
8 Chairman Ken Lawrence as he advocate
9 in Harrisburg and make sure that we
10 save SEPTA, but most importantly,
11 address the crisis that's before us.

12 And I'm pretty confident
13 with this legislative body who's
14 always stepping up to the plate and
15 us working in partnership with our
16 legislators in Harrisburg that we
17 will save SEPTA. I think 2026 will
18 come, I believe we will be in a good
19 place so I have to speak it into
20 existence and we're going to do the
21 hard work to make sure that's going
22 to happen. Not under my watch, not
23 under this body's watch that SEPTA's
24 not going to be supported. And so

1 we stand on that.

2 The Chair recognizes

3 Councilman Jamie Gauthier, then

4 Councilmember Bass, then

5 Councilmember O'Rourke who will wrap

6 us up.

7 COUNCILMEMBER GAUTHIER:

8 Thank you, Council President.

9 I appreciated the exchange
10 just now with Councilmember Thomas
11 about the different ways that City
12 Council can support you at the state
13 level.

14 I wanted you to expound on
15 how SEPTA is coordinating with the
16 city to advocate, effectively, for
17 sustained transit funding at the
18 state or even the federal level?
19 And how you want to be partnering
20 with the city in order to do that?

21 So for example, are there
22 specific efforts or strategic
23 partnerships underway in FY26 to
24 secure additional resources or

1 grants that would mitigate potential
2 service disruptions or budget-driven
3 service disruptions?

4 I also wanted to hear from
5 board member Mike Carroll about
6 what's happening on the
7 administration side. I know the
8 Mayor is a firm believer in
9 intergovernmental partnerships, so I
10 wanted you to talk about what the
11 Parker Administration is doing to
12 lobby Harrisburg to fund SEPTA.

13 Next, I wanted to know how
14 much funding does the city of
15 Philadelphia provide SEPTA as
16 compared to our collar counties?
17 How much service would be cut in the
18 collar counties versus Philadelphia
19 if SEPTA does not receive funding?

20 And then lastly, how can
21 residents support SEPTA's budget
22 needs?

23 SEPTA GM MR. SAUER: Okay.

24 I am jotting down the questions.

1 I'll speak to the city partnerships.
2 I mean, certainly this body has been
3 a great partner. I appreciate
4 the -- the rallies -- the comment
5 Council President had on the
6 rallies. But I will say that the
7 rally that was held out here last
8 Friday, whether or not it makes
9 inwards in Harrisburg or not, it
10 meant something to SEPTA, it meant
11 something to our employees and
12 certainly our riders. So it's --
13 it -- it means a lot.

14 I have spoken with all of
15 you on Council and you've all been
16 very supportive and offered your
17 advocacy. Your voices are so
18 powerful in the region that just the
19 fact when you use your social media
20 platforms, when you use your
21 speaking platforms to speak on
22 behalf of SEPTA it's a powerful
23 message and it works for us. And
24 anything that comes out of this body

1 is a help to us.

2 With regards to the
3 administration, certainly one of our
4 board members is a part of the
5 administration. But I've had
6 conversations myself with the Mayor
7 and I've had conversations with her
8 key staff. They have been very
9 strong voices on behalf of SEPTA.

10 Mayor Parker, of course,
11 was up in Harrisburg herself during
12 the governor's budget address. And
13 she made it a point to talk to me
14 and make sure that I knew that she
15 was advocating on our behalf. So
16 every opportunity I know that the
17 Mayor gets, she takes to advocate on
18 behalf of SEPTA.

19 As for additional funding
20 sources and grant opportunities,
21 there aren't many grant
22 opportunities for operating dollars.
23 It's more in the capital side. But
24 we have a very active grant

1 department that is always searching
2 for opportunities for us.

3 And, of course, if there's
4 anything that Council is aware of
5 that we should be looking at, we're
6 certainly open to those ideas as
7 well. Operating dollars are much
8 more difficult to come by than
9 capital as far as it comes to grant
10 making. And there was something for
11 our board member. I did? What did
12 I --

13 MANAGING DIRECTOR CARROLL:

14 Yeah, the general manager
15 gave you the main answer. And I'll
16 just say that the issue is so
17 important that the Mayor's office
18 has taken that advocacy on
19 themselves and the Mayor herself.
20 And I will -- I will only add this,
21 I mean the Mayor has often, you
22 know, reminded people it's not what
23 you say, it's what you do. And the
24 fact that she has put the budget in

1 for the second year in a row is
2 really the main thing she wants
3 everyone to be responding to when
4 she goes to Harrisburg and asks the
5 Commonwealth to step up to the plate
6 and do that on their own.

7 COUNCILMEMBER GAUTHIER:

8 Thank you. And then lastly, how can
9 residents get involved in this
10 advocacy?

11 SEPTA GM MR. SAUER: It's

12 -- it's --

13 COUNCILMEMBER GAUTHIER:

14 Oh, I'm sorry, also my question
15 about the collar counties, please.

16 SEPTA GM MR. SAUER: I have
17 that as well. So as for the
18 advocacy, our riders and our
19 strongest advocates they have taken
20 up the mantle already. We have seen
21 really powerful social media hits
22 that have gotten the attention of
23 our legislators. We know that
24 firsthand because we've been

1 contacted by them.

2 So we know that the folks
3 out there who are our strongest
4 supporters are our customers. And
5 when as I've made my rounds through
6 the legislature in Harrisburg, I was
7 actually told on more than one
8 occasion we've heard enough from
9 SEPTA. We're not hearing from your
10 people, we're not hearing from your
11 customers.

12 So we took that, brought
13 that back with us. I addressed the
14 chamber, I addressed our advocates,
15 we talked to our citizens advisory
16 committee, our youth advisory
17 committee and they immediately
18 picked up the torch and ran with it.
19 So much so that they are getting --
20 they're getting the attention from
21 our legislators in Harrisburg for
22 sure.

23 So the chamber -- the
24 chamber themselves have -- have been

1 out. They've done a video campaign,
2 they're doing town hall digital
3 campaigns. There's a number of
4 activity that's going on with all of
5 our now business partners. The
6 community, it's really been amazing
7 to see since Thursday alone, the
8 budget announcement, it's really
9 been active amongst our customers.

10 The local subsidies by
11 county, Philadelphia County
12 represents 82 1.5% of our local
13 subsidies, Delaware County is next
14 at 8.1%, Montgomery at 5, Bucks at
15 2.7 and Chester County at 1.6.

16 COUNCILMEMBER GAUTHIER:
17 Would the service cuts be
18 proportional or would they differ by
19 county?

20 SEPTA GM MR. SAUER: So
21 the -- so the first 20% service cuts
22 were proportional 20%. So it was
23 20 -- it amounted to about 20% in
24 every county. Some ticked a point

1 or two higher, some ticked a point
2 or two lower, but generally it was
3 20% across the board.

4 The 45% cut was a little
5 bit different. The regional rail
6 piece really made the difference
7 actually the outer counties are
8 probably getting hit a little harder
9 than because they're losing their
10 regional rail service as opposed to
11 a lot of the city transit service
12 that we still run in Philadelphia.

13 It's not good either way.
14 45% cut is not a good cut no matter
15 how we slice it, but certainly
16 Chester and Montgomery counties are
17 getting hit pretty hard.

18 COUNCILMEMBER GAUTHIER:

19 Thank you. Thank you,
20 Mr. President.

21 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

22 Thank you.

23 The Chair recognizes
24 Councilmember O'Rourke and

1 Councilmember Cindy Bass.

2 COUNCILMEMBER O'ROURKE:

3 Thank you, Mr. President.

4 This may sound young, maybe
5 it's because I'm an independent. I
6 do believe that the time in history
7 may vindicate the point, though.

8 I appreciate the calls for
9 like generating your own money,
10 doubling, you know, your marketing
11 fee, everybody rides the transit,
12 maybe making you pay a little bit
13 more, raise your own dollars.

14 Not just the history, but
15 the new normal is that we have an
16 administration in the White House
17 and by proxy a party that does not
18 believe in rule of law, is not going
19 to make any commitments to
20 supporting things, but I think even
21 more to the point -- to the
22 President's point actually this
23 isn't really just a partisan issue,
24 it's regional, more specifically.

1 This effective cut in
2 revenue and the reason why I'm
3 bringing up this point before I make
4 this question, is that it seems to
5 me -- it's becoming clearer to me
6 that it may be a time where cities
7 got to stand on their own.
8 That's -- it's not -- it's not
9 exciting to hear, it's really
10 frustrating.

11 It shouldn't be that way,
12 but it might be one of those
13 situations where cities are going to
14 have to be holding their own and not
15 have to worry about what other folks
16 refuse to do even when it benefits
17 everybody. This cut in revenue for
18 SEPTA comes at the same time that we
19 understand SEPTA is facing a fiscal
20 crisis with serious service cuts,
21 curfews, rate hikes coming, we've
22 talked about all that.

23 While I believe that we
24 should be doing everything we can to

1 advocate for SEPTA funding at the
2 state level, I want to invite Philly
3 to expand its understanding on what
4 it means to do its part to
5 contribute locally.

6 My team crunched some
7 numbers recently from the U.S.
8 Department of Transportation and
9 realized that although the city
10 recently increased our SEPTA subsidy
11 contribution significantly, which we
12 did. SEPTA still receives far less
13 in local funding than most of its
14 peer cities. Not just the state,
15 but even the cities themselves.

16 Local funding represents
17 about 9 to 10% of SEPTA's operating
18 budget. You said 8% earlier from
19 Philly and the rest, I believe from
20 collar counties. But other cities
21 contribute significantly more. New
22 York contributes about 23%, Seattle
23 contributes about 27%, Chicago
24 contributes about, 40% LA is a big

1 town, they contribute about 50%,
2 about half their budget of its
3 transits operating budget.

4 Does this align with your
5 understanding of our peer cities?

6 MANAGING DIRECTOR CARROLL:
7 I'm going to say yes for both of us.

8 COUNCILMEMBER O'ROURKE:
9 Okay.

10 MANAGING DIRECTOR CARROLL:
11 Yeah, we've been looking at this
12 research for a few years now and
13 under a previous board some work
14 went into identifying some ideas
15 what we might do about it. And so
16 those ideas culminated in a variety
17 of revenue generating options for
18 the five county region so that we
19 could essentially provide more
20 revenue for SEPTA, as these
21 competing metropolitan areas do.

22 And that's basically what
23 it boils down to. The reason why
24 most of our peers are funding more

1 at the local level is because they
2 have revenue generation options at
3 the metropolitan or county or city
4 level that we don't have.
5 Unfortunately that is another issue
6 which we've had a challenge working
7 with the state legislature on.

8 And so we would need
9 authorization from the state in
10 order to explore these revenue
11 generation options. You know,
12 whether we wanted to do them or not
13 even having the opportunity to do
14 that requires state authorization.
15 And we were not able to uh get a
16 bill in front of the legislature,
17 much less passed in order to do
18 that. So that's a question that
19 we're interested in exploring
20 further just to understand what that
21 might look like. Just explore what
22 that might look like.

23 COUNCILMEMBER O'ROURKE: I
24 heard the bell so I'll let it go. I

1 just -- it's just the longer I'm in
2 here and it's only -- it's been a
3 short amount of time and recognizing
4 the times within which we live, I
5 almost feel like we as a city got to
6 got to fail proof ourselves. They
7 won't even give it for education
8 funding and that's -- how many times
9 we had that conversation.

10 So certainly something like
11 transit, I just don't like the
12 feeling of being at the mercy of
13 people who are telling us to our
14 face that they refuse to do the
15 thing that makes the most sense for
16 the widest spread of people. That
17 having been said, thank you,
18 Mr. President.

19 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
20 Thank you. And wrapping us up will
21 be Councilmember Cindy Bass.

22 COUNCILMEMBER BASS: Thank
23 you, Mr. President.

24 Do we have that data?

1 SEPTA GM MR. SAUER: I do.

2 MADAM CHAIR BASS: Super.

3 Can you let us know what -- what you
4 got?

5 SEPTA GM MR. SAUER: So
6 there were -- there have been three
7 FASOs That are either uh completed
8 or underway. One that we've
9 discussed. One is in Ambler had to
10 do with station joint development.
11 That RFP is about to be released,
12 that hasn't been executed yet.
13 Conshohocken station joint
14 development opportunity which was
15 just awarded by the board in March,
16 but a contract hasn't been executed
17 yet.

18 Prior to that there were
19 two unsuccessful FASOs. One was the
20 five station lease that we spoke
21 about earlier was competitively bid
22 in 2023, but it didn't get any bids.
23 And then a 69th Street joint
24 development opportunity back in 2018

1 that was not executed.

2 COUNCILMEMBER BASS: For
3 the -- okay. So do you have the
4 information in terms of the
5 demographic breakdown?

6 SEPTA GM MR. SAUER: As far
7 as cost?

8 COUNCILMEMBER BASS: As far
9 as -- right, as far as who was being
10 considered, who was applying, who
11 was awarded.

12 SEPTA GM MR. SAUER: So
13 Ambler and Conshohocken haven't been
14 executed yet, so there's no cost to
15 speak of at this point.

16 COUNCILMEMBER BASS: The
17 demographic information, too. Thank
18 you.

19 SEPTA GM MR. SAUER: Beg
20 your pardon.

21 COUNCILMEMBER BASS: The
22 demographic information, too.

23 SEPTA GM MR. SAUER: Oh,
24 I'm sorry, the demographic

1 information. So the demographic
2 information I'll have to come back
3 to you on. All I have is the FASOs
4 themselves. I'd have to break out
5 the demographics. Both are regional
6 rail stations I might add,
7 Councilmember. They are Ambler and
8 Conshohocken.

9 COUNCILMEMBER BASS: Okay.
10 We really need that information.

11 SEPTA GM MR. SAUER: I will
12 do that.

13 COUNCILMEMBER BASS:
14 Because to make decisions and to
15 have this level of discomfort with
16 decisions, past decisions that have
17 been made, I think that it really is
18 something very important. Not just
19 to myself, but to other members of
20 the Council so.

21 SEPTA GM MR. SAUER: I
22 understand. I also have the cost of
23 the bus revolution, if you'd like
24 that.

1 COUNCILMEMBER BASS: Yes.

2 SEPTA GM MR. SAUER: 3.7

3 million to date.

4 COUNCILMEMBER BASS: So

5 we've spent \$3.7 million and we've

6 changed some bus routes, but we

7 aren't able to finish executing the

8 projects?

9 SEPTA GM MR. SAUER: Yes.

10 The bulk of that -- of that dollar

11 amount was geared towards the bus --

12 the bus network redesign that is

13 waiting to be executed.

14 MADAM CHAIR BASS: What is

15 the bus network redesign? What does

16 that mean?

17 SEPTA GM MR. SAUER:

18 That's -- that's the bus revolution.

19 COUNCILMEMBER BASS: So

20 that's changing the numbers,

21 changing the letters to numbers.

22 SEPTA GM MR. SAUER: Well,

23 that's part of it, but it's also

24 changing all the routes themselves.

1 The frequency, high frequency
2 network, the reliability, the
3 transfers. The things that -- all
4 the outreach that we did for a
5 couple years til --

6 COUNCILMEMBER BASS: You
7 said \$3.67 million --

8 SEPTA GM MR. SAUER: To
9 date.

10 COUNCILMEMBER BASS: -- on
11 this. Okay. I'm not sure that it's
12 -- it's the best use of resources
13 especially at a critical time like
14 this. Actually I don't -- let me
15 just put it this way, I don't think
16 it's the best use of resources.
17 Maybe you -- I'm assuming that there
18 was some kind of discussion that
19 had -- that had to explain why
20 internally you all felt that this
21 was something that you had to do,
22 that was important to do. I'm still
23 not hearing that, but I don't want
24 to belabor the point.

1 The other thing I wanted to
2 hear, just really briefly, it's been
3 touched on here and there. But I
4 wanted to go back on just sort of
5 like quality of life in terms of
6 riding SEPTA. Because if you want
7 to get your fares up, if you want to
8 generate more revenue, one of the
9 first things you have to do is
10 collect revenue. And so fare
11 evasion is just a huge problem.

12 The last time I rode SEPTA
13 I was getting on the Broad Street
14 line and the person in front of me
15 just hopped right over, like it was
16 nothing to it. And, you know, and
17 it wasn't one person, it was like
18 maybe two or three young men, but
19 they just hopped right on over, like
20 there was nothing to it.

21 And also, smoking on --
22 smoking weed on the Market-Frankfort
23 and also the Broad Street line,
24 which is a problem. I've had staff

1 come in and said, you know, like
2 that they had to tell people who
3 were near them smoking first thing
4 in the morning, you know, can you go
5 somewhere else because I have to go
6 to work and I can't -- you know, I
7 don't want to have that, carry that
8 smell all day.

9 SEPTA GM MR. SAUER: Right.

10 COUNCILMEMBER BASS: And
11 so, you know, this shouldn't be a
12 conversation that people have to
13 have with other commuters on the --
14 on the Broad Street line.

15 SEPTA GM MR. SAUER:
16 Agreed. You want to take that?

17 CHIEF LAWSON: Yeah. So
18 some of the progress we made with
19 recruitment and retention has
20 certainly contributed to, you know,
21 things like our enforcement level.
22 Enforcement level across the board
23 in all the categories of the crimes
24 that we enforce is up dramatically.

1 I can -- fare evasion
2 specifically I'll address. I can
3 assure you fare evasion for the
4 entire organization from the GM down
5 is essentially our No. 1 priority
6 right now. It has exploded after
7 COVID. Some of the policies that we
8 implemented hurt us coming out of
9 COVID. But as we have scaled up in
10 law enforcement, enforcement is
11 through the roof.

12 We have put together a work
13 group within SEPTA comprised of a
14 number of staff departments and
15 operating departments addressing
16 fare evasion specifically. Some of
17 the -- some of the changes we made
18 in that, I mean Councils familiar
19 with the fact that we have -- we
20 have returned -- we've gotten away
21 from an administrative model of
22 enforcement, came back to a criminal
23 justice model. Increasing fines for
24 fare evasion on the system.

1 We've implemented much
2 better tracking capability across
3 SEPTA, so we have better data now to
4 help deploy police officers and
5 figure out ways to get our hands
6 around this. We have coordinated
7 with media outlets. We got to do a
8 much better job with that in terms
9 of educating our customers, letting
10 them know we are cracking down on
11 fare evasion. It's necessary and
12 what it does to our customers when
13 people don't pay a fare, how it
14 harms our customers.

15 We coordinated with the
16 courts to make sure that they're
17 aware how important this is for us.
18 That -- that all of the citations
19 that we write for fare evasion, we
20 need them to be enforced at a high
21 level. We are seeing that and so
22 we're -- we're happy about that.

23 Fare evasion, specifically
24 I'll just talk about the police

1 department enforcement level for
2 fare evasion was up 167% last year.
3 So essentially, three times the
4 level of enforcement from the year
5 before through the first quarter of
6 '25, we've increased on top of that
7 another 171%. I mean, pretty soon
8 we're going to be doing nothing at
9 the police department, but enforcing
10 fares on the system. We are
11 throwing really a lot at it right
12 now.

13 Smoking, I agree smoking is
14 the No. 1 complaint from our
15 customers. Much more than fare
16 evasion. The authority contributed
17 to -- worked with it closely with
18 the city on a smoke free ad campaign
19 last year. We got some traction
20 with that. We saw a reduction on
21 the system, and then customer
22 service scores started to improve.

23 We are going to translate
24 that same exact model to fare

1 evasion now because we saw some
2 success with it. But smoking
3 enforcement across the system for us
4 there were more than 3,000 tickets
5 issued last year. That was up 136%
6 from the year before.

7 COUNCILMEMBER BASS: Okay.
8 If you could put the information we
9 requested earlier -- I requested
10 earlier, if you could put that in
11 writing and provide it to the Chair,
12 we would appreciate it so that we
13 can circle back and have more
14 conversation on it, just because I
15 didn't get all the facts down, but
16 we would like to have that in
17 writing. And I think that's it for
18 right now.

19 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

20 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

21 Thank you, Member Bass.

22 Scott Sauer, I want to
23 thank you and your team for being
24 here for this budget hearing. And

1 welcome. It's part of the process.

2 SEPTA GM MR. SAUER: Thank
3 you, Council President.

4 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
5 Welcome and wish you the best as you
6 continue to advocate. But just know
7 that these members will make sure
8 everything in our body possibly that
9 we can do, from an advocacy
10 standpoint, partnership standpoint
11 that we will figure out a way to
12 save SEPTA. We will have funding
13 going into '26, whatever that looks
14 like.

15 And I also say, for the
16 record, for those who are
17 documenting. It can't be on the
18 city of Philadelphia. We're doing
19 our part. There's a 12 billion
20 surplus in Harrisburg, \$12 billion.
21 The governor has a proposal for \$300
22 million that could significantly
23 support our efforts of making sure
24 SEPTA has funding. And so we will

1 advocate, work and partner to make
2 sure that this happens. As I say,
3 not on my watch.

4 With that being said, thank
5 you very much.

6 The Chair recognizes
7 Majority Whip Councilmember Isaiah
8 Thomas for a motion to adjourn.

9 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: So
10 move, Council President.

11 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

12 It has been moved and
13 properly seconded that the public
14 hearing and the meeting on the bills
15 and resolutions before the committee
16 today stand in recess until Tuesday,
17 April 22nd at 10:00 a.m, room 400,
18 City Hall.

19 All those in favor signify
20 by saying aye.

21 (Aye.)

22 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

23 Those opposed? The ayes have it.

24 The motion carries.

1 We stand in recess to April

2 22nd at 10:00 a.m.

3 Happy Easter, everyone, and

4 happy Passover, if you celebrate.

5 (Public hearing and meeting on bills and resolutions

6 concluded at 3:55 p.m.)

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

I hereby certify that the proceedings and evidence are contained fully and accurately in the notes taken by me of the above case, and this copy is a correct transcript of the same.

Samanda J. Rios

Samanda J. Rios
Court Reporter
Notary Public of PA & DE

(The foregoing certification of this transcript does not apply to any reproduction of the same by any means unless under the direct control and/or supervision of the certifying reporter.)

	\$218,000	\$7,384,	1.6	167:1	167%
\$	13:13	841	360:15	181:13	377:2
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\$113	\$3.67	183:22	10%	18	333:20
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\$12	\$3.7	\$8	364:17	342:19	139:6
180:19	371:5	37:16	10,000	130,000	171%
379:20	\$300	120:11	16:8	16:6	377:7
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\$213	\$675	375:5	308:4	225:13	2
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172:20	171:21	12:9	333:24	174:1	33
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