

Committee on Parks, Recreation and Cultural Affairs
April 9, 2021

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

Remote location using Microsoft® Teams
Friday, April 9, 2021
9:30 a.m.

PRESENT:

COUNCILWOMAN CINDY BASS, CHAIR
COUNCILWOMAN JAMIE GAUTHIER, VICE-CHAIR
COUNCILWOMAN KENDRA BROOKS
COUNCILMAN KENYATTA JOHNSON
COUNCILMAN ISAIAH THOMAS

RESOLUTIONS: 210198, 210199

1 - - -

2 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: This is the
3 Committee on Parks, Recreation and
4 Cultural Affairs. I want to welcome
5 everyone to the hearing.

6 I understand that state law
7 currently requires that the following
8 announcement be made at the beginning of
9 every remote public hearing as follows:

10 Due to the current public health
11 emergency, City Council Committees are
12 currently meeting remotely. We are
13 using Microsoft Teams to make these
14 remote hearings possible.

15 Instructions for how the public
16 may view and offer public testimony at
17 public hearings of Council Committees
18 are included in the public hearing
19 notices that are published in the Daily
20 News, Inquirer and Legal Intelligencer
21 prior to the hearings and can also be
22 found on PHLCouncil.com.

23 I now note that the hour has
24 come and, Clerk, could you please call
25 the roll to take attendance. Members

1 that are in attendance will please
2 indicate that you are present when your
3 name is called. Also, please say a few
4 brief words when responding so that your
5 image will be displayed on screen when
6 you speak.

7 Madam Clerk.

8 THE CLERK: Councilmember
9 Gauthier.

10 COUNCILWOMAN GAUTHIER:
11 (Muted).

12 COUNCILWOMAN BASS:
13 Councilwoman, you're on mute.

14 COUNCILWOMAN GAUTHIER: I'm
15 sorry. Good morning, Madam Chair. Good
16 morning, colleagues. Good morning,
17 everyone. Present.

18 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Good
19 morning.

20 THE CLERK: Councilmember
21 Quinones-Sanchez.

22 (No response.)

23 THE CLERK: Councilmember
24 Johnson.

25 COUNCILMAN JOHNSON: Good

1 morning, everyone. Good morning. Good
2 morning. Good morning.

3 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Good
4 morning.

5 THE CLERK: Councilmember
6 Thomas.

7 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Good
8 morning, Madam Chair. Good morning,
9 colleagues. I'm present.

10 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Good
11 morning.

12 THE CLERK: Councilmember
13 Jones.

14 (No response.)

15 THE CLERK: Councilmember
16 Brooks.

17 COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: Good
18 morning, Madam Chair, colleagues and
19 everyone. Present.

20 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Good
21 morning.

22 THE CLERK: And, Chair Bass.

23 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Good
24 morning. I am present. Okay. So we do
25 have a quorum to begin, and a quorum of

1 this Committee is present and the
2 hearing is now called to order.

3 This is the public hearing of
4 the Committee on Parks, Recreation and
5 Cultural Affairs regarding Resolutions
6 210198 and 210199.

7 Clerk, will you please read the
8 title of those resolutions.

9 THE CLERK: Resolution No.
10 210198, a resolution authorizing the
11 Committee of Parks, Recreation and
12 Cultural Affairs to hold hearings to
13 obtain an update on the status of the
14 City's plan to ensure all parks or
15 playgrounds owned or controlled by the
16 City of Philadelphia are inclusive,
17 intergenerational and accessible and for
18 all disabilities and special needs.

19 And Resolution No. 210199, a
20 resolution authorizing the Committee of
21 Parks, Recreation and Cultural Affairs
22 to hold hearings to obtain an update on
23 the status of the City Council's
24 security camera program for
25 Philadelphia's playgrounds and

1 recreation centers.

2 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Thank you.

3 Before we begin to hear testimony from

4 the witnesses we have for today,

5 everyone who has been invited to the

6 meeting to testify should be aware that

7 this public hearing is being recorded.

8 Because the hearing is public,

9 participants and viewers have no

10 reasonable expectation of privacy. By

11 continuing to be in the meeting, you are

12 consenting to being recorded.

13 Additionally, prior to

14 recognizing Members for the questions

15 and comments they have for witnesses, I

16 will note for the record at this time

17 that we will use the chat feature

18 available in Microsoft Teams to allow

19 Members to signify that they wish to be

20 recognized. In order to comply with the

21 Sunshine Act, the chat feature must only

22 be used for this purpose.

23 Before I call on the Clerk to

24 call the first panel, would any of my

25 colleagues like to make any opening

1 comments?

2 (No response.)

3 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Okay.

4 Seeing none, we're going to move right
5 along here.

6 If we could have Madam Clerk --
7 actually, I would like to take the
8 resolutions out of order just based on
9 the urgency of the matter around 210199
10 regarding cameras and our playgrounds
11 and recreation centers. So I would like
12 to actually call the panels and
13 witnesses on Resolution 210199 first.

14 Madam Clerk.

15 THE CLERK: Our first panel is
16 Aparna Palantino, Deputy Commissioner
17 for Capital Infrastructure and Natural
18 Land Management from the Department of
19 Parks and Recreation and Kathryn Ott
20 Lovell, Commissioner of the Department
21 of Parks and Recreation.

22 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Very good.
23 Thank you.

24 And if we could have both of
25 our testifiers state your name for the

1 record and proceed with your testimony.

2 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PALANTINO:

3 Aparna Palantino.

4 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: You may
5 proceed.

6 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PALANTINO:

7 Okay. Good morning, Chairperson Bass
8 and members of the Committee on Parks,
9 Recreation and Cultural Affairs. My
10 name is Aparna Palantino and I serve as
11 the Deputy Commissioner of Parks and
12 Recreation for Capital Infrastructure
13 and National Land Management. With me
14 today is Commissioner Ott Lovell to
15 testify on City Council Resolution No.
16 210199, which authorizes hearings to
17 obtain an update on the status of the
18 City Council's security camera program
19 for Philadelphia's playgrounds and
20 recreation centers.

21 To highlight the key data
22 points on our security camera program
23 from the handout labeled Camera List
24 that was provided to Council, since 2014
25 we have installed 1,536 security cameras

1 at 126 sites city-wide at a total cost
2 of \$5,328,775. An additional 20 sites
3 are currently in either design or
4 construction phases.

5 There are 33 currently
6 identified sites which are still in need
7 of cameras, three of which will be part
8 of the Rebuild program. The estimated
9 funding required to complete all of the
10 projects in either the design or
11 to-be-designed phase is \$1,795,000. Our
12 list of security cameras is a fluid
13 document with additional sites added,
14 prioritized and updated based on input
15 and funding allocations from City
16 Councilmembers and their designated
17 staff. I will be happy to answer any
18 questions that you may have on security
19 cameras at the conclusion of
20 Commissioner Ott Lovell's testimony
21 immediately following on criminal
22 incident reporting. Thank you.

23 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Thank you.
24 Commissioner, do you want to go and then
25 we'll take questions.

1 COMMISSIONER OTT LOVELL: Yes,
2 Madam Chair. Give me one second to pull
3 it up.

4 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Sure.

5 COMMISSIONER OTT LOVELL: Good
6 morning, Chairperson Bass and members of
7 the Committee. I'm Commissioner Kathryn
8 Ott Lovell. I'm here today to provide
9 annual reporting information on all
10 known criminal incidents or activity
11 which has taken place on Parks and
12 Recreation land, whether recreation
13 centers, playgrounds or parks.

14 We have provided five detailed
15 criminal incident annual reports from
16 2016 through 2020 in keeping with both
17 the law and the spirit of the
18 requirements of Bill No. 120828,
19 introduced by Chairperson Bass and
20 passed in 2013. Each report contains a
21 detailed breakdown of Part 1 violent
22 crimes, Part 1 property crimes and Part
23 2 crimes at each Parks and Recreation
24 controlled or owned site in all 10
25 Council Districts.

1 For your information, the
2 Uniform Crime Reporting Program divides
3 offenses into major classifications
4 known as Part 1 and Part 2 crimes. The
5 types of actual reported offenses are
6 indicated in a column under each part in
7 the annual reports. In addition, all
8 crime data was acquired up to 5 feet
9 from our property boundaries. I
10 encourage each of you to review the data
11 provided, both the aggregate numbers as
12 well as the Council District specific
13 numbers.

14 Our Department remains fully
15 committed to working to lessen crime at
16 all of our sites. However, Parks and
17 Recreation can contribute only so much
18 alone to solve the city-wide violence
19 issue. We can and do provide positive
20 youth programs. We can and do provide
21 team mentoring as well as robust
22 athletic and recreational supports. Too
23 often Parks and Recreation staff
24 themselves are victims of violence,
25 whether it be physically, emotionally or

1 psychologically.

2 We earnestly ask for a need of
3 support of families, the wider
4 community, City Council, the police,
5 town watch and many other concerned
6 citizens and groups to help us reduce
7 gun violence and related criminal
8 behaviors at our sites. Deputy
9 Commissioner Palantino and I are happy
10 to answer your questions concerning the
11 security camera program as well as the
12 annual crime reports. Thank you.

13 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Thank you,
14 Commissioner.

15 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: I'll just
16 start first. I have a number of
17 questions. And the first is,
18 Commissioner, based on your statement
19 I'd like to know the reports that have
20 been provided, how have they been
21 provided? Because to the best of my
22 knowledge as the Chair of Parks and
23 Recreation, I have never received a
24 report.

25 COMMISSIONER OTT LOVELL: How

1 have they been provided to you --

2 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: You said
3 you provided reports since 2016, that
4 this data has been available to
5 District -- I'm assuming to all
6 Councilmembers. So how has this
7 information been provided? I obviously
8 had several meetings with you over the
9 course of the years regarding all sorts
10 of matters, but we've never had an
11 opportunity to sit down and discuss this
12 very important information.

13 COMMISSIONER OTT LOVELL: Yeah.
14 We just created those reports and
15 provided them within the last few weeks
16 for those reports.

17 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: So they
18 have not been done since 2016?

19 COMMISSIONER OTT LOVELL: We
20 have provided the reports since 2016.
21 But you are correct, we have not
22 provided them on an annual basis,
23 correct.

24 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Okay.
25 Because that really works against the

1 spirit of the legislation when it was
2 introduced. The idea behind providing
3 the reports was that if there is
4 something happening, so for example, if
5 in my District I have Pleasant
6 Playground and something is happening
7 and I see that there's an increase in
8 activities around Pleasant Playground
9 that are negatively affecting the
10 quality of life for the residents and
11 also for anyone who's using the center,
12 making it less likely that people want
13 to use the center, then that is an
14 opportunity by providing the reports it
15 allows me an opportunity to say I want
16 to invest more here, I need to beef up
17 my town watch in this neighborhood, I
18 need to talk to the Managing Director's
19 Office and see what kind of support we
20 can get.

21 But by not having those reports
22 over the years has really added to the
23 conditions that we see right now that
24 has made everyone less safe, whether
25 it's Parks and Recreation staff, whether

1 it's our young people who are using
2 these centers, the entire community.

3 So I really have to say I'm
4 very disappointed that it required a
5 hearing. Let's be honest, it required a
6 hearing for Parks and Recreation to
7 follow the law and to provide City
8 Council the reports on what is happening
9 regarding criminal activity at these
10 sites.

11 COMMISSIONER OTT LOVELL: Well,
12 we now have the ability and the capacity
13 to get the data that we need from PPD,
14 so we should be able to provide these
15 reports to you moving forward.

16 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Was this
17 data not available previously?

18 COMMISSIONER OTT LOVELL: We
19 have recently increased our capacity in
20 terms of our GIS team, so we add a full-
21 time member who's now working with PPD.
22 We have the layers of data that we need.
23 We have lots of information and data
24 about our own recreation centers, but
25 the crime data of course comes from the

1 Police Department. So we now have the
2 ability to do that and we look forward
3 to providing those reports in the
4 future.

5 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Is there
6 any other outstanding reporting or
7 information that is required by law that
8 Parks and Recreation is not providing
9 because they do not have the capacity to
10 provide it?

11 COMMISSIONER OTT LOVELL: Not
12 that I know of.

13 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Okay.
14 I'd like a definitive answer. If you
15 could just double-check with your people
16 while we are in the hearing and just
17 make sure that there are no additional
18 requirements that have been legislative
19 that Parks and Recreation has not been
20 providing because of capacity issues,
21 unwillingness issues, whatever the
22 issues are that there is nothing else
23 that's out there that's outstanding.

24 COMMISSIONER OTT LOVELL: Madam
25 Chair, we would need more information

1 about what those specific requests were
2 to be able to provide that information.
3 At this point, I know of nothing that we
4 should be providing that we aren't
5 providing.

6 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Did you
7 know that you should be providing this
8 report before? Did you know that this
9 report was legislative and the law?

10 COMMISSIONER OTT LOVELL: I
11 certainly didn't know until more
12 recently that we had to provide that
13 information. And so, we worked to build
14 the capacity and to get the data that we
15 needed, the layers that we needed to
16 provide that information.

17 There was also some confusion
18 about who could provide the information.
19 Because again, that's not information
20 that we had within the Department within
21 our own data. So we were happy to
22 provide the information now. We will
23 continue to provide the information on
24 an annual basis.

25 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Okay.

1 Question regarding the security camera
2 program, can you speak about -- actually
3 I'm going to ask you to go back over the
4 numbers, Aparna, if you would, regarding
5 what has been done thus far.

6 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PALANTINO:
7 Certainly. So to date, we've installed
8 1536 security cameras at 126 sites.

9 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Mm-hmm.

10 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PALANTINO:
11 The total cost of this initiative to
12 date is about \$5,328,775.

13 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Mm-hmm.

14 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PALANTINO:
15 Additional 20 sites are either in design
16 or construction.

17 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Mm-hmm.

18 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PALANTINO:
19 Leaving 33 identified sites that are
20 still in need of security cameras.

21 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Okay.

22 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PALANTINO:
23 The funding requirement for those 33 is
24 1.8 million roughly.

25 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: 1.8

1 million.

2 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PALANTINO:

3 Yes.

4 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: And for the
5 20 in design, what's the cost on those?

6 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PALANTINO:

7 The 20 in design is roughly \$572,000.

8 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Okay.

9 That's manageable. So my question is,
10 and I don't know if you can answer this
11 or the Commissioner can answer this,
12 originally when we required or asked --
13 not required actually, because this was
14 not legislative. This was something
15 that was an initiative my office
16 undertook working with all District
17 members of Council and received a
18 commitment from all District members
19 that there was going to be over a
20 three-year time period the resources
21 allocated from their capital ITEF funds
22 that would go into this security
23 program.

24 Ideally because we started this
25 in 2014, it should have been wrapped up

1 in 2017. So you can imagine my concern
2 and just not being able to understand
3 why when we have shootings now why they
4 are not caught on camera when they're
5 happening at our rec centers, because in
6 my mind we addressed this by making sure
7 that there were cameras at every site.

8 So can you talk to me as to why
9 in 2021, which is four years past the
10 expiration date, we don't have cameras
11 at these sites? Can you talk about that
12 a little bit?

13 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PALANTINO:
14 Certainly. Actually, in 2014 we had
15 developed a list of sites and the total
16 cost of that initiative was
17 approximately \$3.7 million in total. In
18 2014 the sites that were identified were
19 primarily staff sites.

20 Over the course of time, we've
21 noticed that there are other assets in
22 our system that are also in need of
23 security camera installation, so these
24 are smaller unstaffed sites, they're
25 neighborhood parks that are also

1 requiring cameras. So Councilmembers
2 had to redirect some of their funding
3 based on the need in particular areas.
4 So in fact, we've spent almost \$2
5 million more than what was originally
6 anticipated on this initiative. And
7 there's been a significant number of
8 sites added to the initial list which is
9 why --

10 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Okay.

11 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PALANTINO:
12 -- we still have sites remaining.

13 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: But my
14 question is this: So if we know that
15 there are additional sites that were
16 added and I'm assuming that they were
17 added in 2014 or through the course of
18 somewhere between 2014 and 2017, in my
19 mind everything that we identified in
20 2014 should have been completed and that
21 doesn't seem to be the case.

22 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PALANTINO:
23 So the sites have been added over time
24 from 2014 until today. The challenge is
25 also that this initiative is funded by

1 City Councilmembers and it is reliant on
2 availability of funding. Often times
3 these camera installations are done in
4 conjunction with the capital project
5 that occurs at a site. So if we're
6 doing an improvement, City
7 Councilmembers will elect to include
8 cameras in that project. So some of the
9 funding has been directed to other
10 locations.

11 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Okay. So
12 can you give me the rundown of the sites
13 that are in design and in need right
14 now?

15 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PALANTINO:
16 I can. And we've also provided that
17 document as part of our submission
18 today.

19 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Okay.

20 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PALANTINO:
21 The sites and design, some of which are
22 also Rebuild, I just wanted to say,
23 sites and design include Murphy, Seger,
24 Starr Garden, Granahan, Houston, Mander,
25 Parkside Evans, Disston, Jacobs,

1 McArdle, Houseman, Ziehler, Hammond and
2 Nedro and Tarken.

3 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Okay.

4 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PALANTINO:
5 Those are currently in design. And the
6 remaining sites include Pop's, Herron,
7 Rizzo Rink, Sacks Playground, Samuel,
8 Cibotti, Eastwick, Garron(ph), Stinger,
9 Wharton Square, Laura Simms, 39th and
10 Olive, Carousel House, Conshohocken
11 Playground, Gustine, Hillside, John
12 Anderson, Shuler, Amos, Francisville,
13 Holmesburg, Mullin, Ramp, Carmella Cruz,
14 Ferko, Gambrel, McPherson, McIlvain and
15 Ramblers.

16 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Okay. I'm
17 just going to ask you off the cuff
18 because I haven't actually looked at the
19 list, but I would like to know is there
20 any one particular part of the City, are
21 those spread out evenly or are there
22 some parts of the City that we're seeing
23 less cameras than others?

24 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PALANTINO:
25 No, they're generally spread out evenly.

1 And many of the sites as I mentioned,
2 there's about seven of them that are
3 Rebuild so they will be installed in
4 conjunction with the Rebuild project.
5 And the remaining sites are often
6 smaller sites so there isn't a
7 concentration in any one particular
8 area.

9 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Okay. I'm
10 going to open it up for questions from
11 my colleagues.

12 I see Councilwoman Gauthier had
13 a question. Councilwoman.

14 COUNCILWOMAN GAUTHIER: I have
15 more of a comment. Thank you, Madam
16 Chair.

17 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Yes.

18 COUNCILWOMAN GAUTHIER: Good
19 morning, Commissioner Ott Lovell. Good
20 morning, Aparna.

21 I wanted to thank Parks & Rec
22 for all they've been doing. As everyone
23 knows, we've had tragic shootings at rec
24 centers. We had a mass shooting at
25 Christy Rec Center. I believe we had a

1 shooting last night in West Mill Creek
2 at the playground or near the
3 playground. Kathryn's looking puzzled.
4 So if that's false information, then I
5 don't want to put it out there. So it's
6 just been a heartbreaking time.

7 But I do want to say that I've
8 seen Parks & Rec step up immediately to
9 come together with community, to come
10 together with me and my office to make
11 necessary improvements. The day after
12 the incident at Christy they were out
13 there making improvements to the
14 lighting. They got new fencing up
15 immediately. That is a site where we
16 have cameras so we were able to pull
17 some of that data. And we're going
18 forward not only with physical
19 improvement but also with bringing the
20 community together to ensure that we can
21 have a robust amount of safe programming
22 for the community.

23 And so, what happened was
24 tragic but it means so much to have the
25 attention and the dedication that we've

1 had from the Parks & Rec team even after
2 such a tragic incident and that's what
3 it's going to take, that type of
4 partnership and engagement to change the
5 perception not only around Christy Rec
6 but in all of the areas where we've had
7 these tragedies.

8 And I also want to acknowledge
9 that we had to make some really hard
10 decisions last year. We cut the Parks &
11 Rec's budget by a lot. And I think
12 everyone on Council realizes how
13 important these assets are to our
14 community. And so, I hope that we will
15 make different decisions this budget
16 cycle so that we can have the staffing,
17 the security, the programming and the
18 physical improvement that we need to
19 really have safe, active centers that
20 are assets to our community. So thank
21 you so much for being here today.

22 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Thank you,
23 Councilwoman. I appreciate your
24 commendation of Parks & Rec. I think
25 that there's a lot to be done. I'll

1 just say it that way. There's a whole
2 lot to be done.

3 And one of the things that I
4 would like to see from Parks and
5 Recreation is more of a sense of urgency
6 around these cameras. We have to have
7 them up like yesterday. Again, this was
8 something that was initiated in 2014 and
9 was supposed to be completed in three
10 years. And I understand that things
11 happen, additional sites were added. If
12 the data we had been provided with from
13 Parks & Rec was accurate in the first
14 place, we probably could have got it
15 down in a more reasonable time frame.
16 So I would like to see more of a sense
17 of urgency.

18 I'd like for you, Commissioner,
19 to address how you intend to make that
20 happen so we can figure out when a
21 shooting happens -- hopefully, we won't
22 have any more shootings at our rec
23 centers. That's the ultimate goal, is
24 not to have them. But when they do
25 happen, what can we do, what can Parks &

1 Rec do to keep our children safe?

2 One of the things that I really
3 want to point out here because outside
4 of the Police Department and
5 Commissioner Outlaw and DHS and Cynthia
6 Figueroa, Parks & Rec has in my opinion
7 the absolute obligation to keep our
8 children in safe spaces. So I think in
9 terms of the ranking of City departments
10 and where our children need to be, how
11 do we keep them safe, Parks and
12 Recreation is way up here. It's almost
13 at the top of the food chain. And yet,
14 we are not seeing the level of
15 investment and the urgency that I would
16 like to see. And I think that we need
17 to make everyone feel safe and to make
18 sure that people feel comfortable going
19 into our sites.

20 The next resolution that we're
21 going to hear is actually on making our
22 spaces intergenerational. And so,
23 that's a place where let's say if you're
24 a grandmother and you care for your
25 grandkids, you can take your grandkids

1 over to the rec center or to the
2 playground and it's welcoming for you.
3 It's a place you want to be as well.
4 They're intergenerational. They're open
5 for people with different disabilities.
6 There's a lot going on for everyone at
7 the site.

8 The bottom line is people don't
9 want to go if they don't feel safe. So
10 it's a heavy lift, but it is a
11 responsibility of Parks and Recreation
12 so I would like to hear your response.

13 COMMISSIONER OTT LOVELL: Well,
14 we -- I want to thank Councilmember
15 Gauthier for her kind words and for her
16 incredible leadership and support, as
17 many of these incidents have happened in
18 her District, and for bringing us
19 together with the police captains in her
20 District and community leaders and
21 community organizations.

22 To be honest, Madam Chair,
23 we're doing everything we can and I
24 totally agree with you that Parks and
25 Recreation needs to be a priority. We

1 need to be viewed as an essential human
2 social service in the City of
3 Philadelphia and we need to be funded as
4 such. And it is an incredible challenge
5 to run a system our size.

6 We are blessed to have a Parks
7 and Recreation system that's larger than
8 any other city our size, maybe one of
9 the largest in the country. New York
10 City has about 50 recreation centers.
11 You have to pay to go into them. They
12 have a population 10 times our size. We
13 have 159 recreation centers. We're
14 blessed. We made that decision to have
15 these centers in every community of our
16 City and they are deeply loved by
17 Philadelphians.

18 At 100 of our recreation
19 centers, we have one person on staff.
20 And can you imagine being that one
21 person in that facility doing everything
22 we expect them to do by themselves.
23 They're siloed. They're scared and
24 still trying to be advocates and
25 champions and in many ways families for

1 these young people.

2 We've made a commitment as of
3 this week and in part as a response to
4 the increase and violence that we're
5 seeing specifically at rec centers and
6 open spaces over the last few weeks. I
7 can't explain why people are choosing to
8 bring guns and solve problems at parks
9 and recreation centers over the last six
10 weeks. I can't explain that. But I can
11 tell you it's happening. And in
12 response to that, we're choosing to
13 have -- we're making the choice to make
14 sure we have two staff people at all rec
15 centers to make sure that our staff feel
16 safe and that families feel safe sending
17 children to our centers.

18 It is heartbreaking to ride
19 into these communities and hear mothers
20 and grandmothers say that I don't feel
21 safe sending my kids down to the
22 playground anymore because there was a
23 shooting there. It's heartbreaking.
24 It's heartbreaking that I have to
25 second-guess it when I bring my kids to

1 my playground in West Philadelphia after
2 6 o'clock at night. That should not
3 enter your mind.

4 And let me tell you, the kids
5 that were shot, they were doing exactly
6 what we wanted them to do. They were
7 getting out of their homes and going
8 down to the playground to play ball. So
9 what I can say is we absolutely feel a
10 sense of urgency. I feel it like I've
11 never felt anything in my life.

12 Everyone on our staff feels a sense of
13 urgency. I believe the Administration,
14 the Office of Children and Families
15 feels an incredible sense of urgency and
16 I felt a level of support from them that
17 I haven't felt in the five years that
18 I've been in City government, it's been
19 extraordinary, and the police as well.

20 I've talked to the police
21 inspectors, the deputy commissioners
22 more over the last five weeks. There is
23 a commitment. They've authorized
24 overtime for the sites that have the
25 highest rate of crime and violence and

1 where our leaders feel that they need
2 the extra support for police, so we now
3 have a police presence at more than 50
4 of our sites.

5 We're working closely with,
6 again, community organizations. I had a
7 wonderful meeting yesterday over an hour
8 with the Black Clergy to talk to them
9 about the support that they want to
10 provide. So I feel we are finally at a
11 point I think where people are
12 recognizing exactly what you said,
13 Chairwoman, that Parks and Recreation
14 does need to be here. It needs to be
15 prioritized. It needs to be resourced
16 at that level. It needs to be supported
17 at that level and championed at that
18 level, right. And until we get to that
19 point, we're going to continue to
20 struggle as a city because we have
21 chosen to have this amazing system in
22 place, right, and we have to be prepared
23 to support that system. So I feel that
24 sense of urgency. That's what I can say
25 to you in response.

1 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Well, I
2 think that -- and I know that
3 Councilwoman Brooks and Councilman
4 Thomas were next up. But I just want to
5 say this, I'm glad to hear that you feel
6 a sense of urgency. I'd like to see it
7 put into action.

8 One of the things that I'd like
9 to have all members of Council do is as
10 I said, because of the urgency of what
11 we see now around our young people,
12 really fight for an increase in
13 additional funding for Parks & Rec in
14 the upcoming budget cycle. But what we
15 want to see is not just an increase in
16 funding, but a direct result of the
17 increase in funding should be an
18 increase in programs and services from
19 the rec centers.

20 And I kind of thought that that
21 was already on the Administration's
22 agenda with Parks and Recreation moved
23 over to the Managing Director's Office
24 over to the Deputy Mayor for Children
25 and Youth Cynthia Figueroa. So I don't

1 know if that was what the strategy was
2 behind that or why that actually
3 happened. You're nodding your head yes.
4 So was that going to come with an
5 increase in funding, Commissioner?

6 COMMISSIONER OTT LOVELL: An
7 increase in resources, certainly.

8 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Good.

9 COMMISSIONER OTT LOVELL: Yeah,
10 the support that we received from the
11 Deputy Mayor and her team has been
12 extraordinary. To give you an example,
13 after these shootings occurred -- these
14 centers where the shootings occurred are
15 access centers. We've got children
16 there who were showing up at 7:30 the
17 next morning and parents who are leaving
18 their children at a center to learn
19 while they have to go to work. And OCF
20 provided us with immediate services
21 around behavioral health supports for
22 staff and children.

23 And again, that was always
24 available to us. But I want to say that
25 the responsiveness of the Deputy Mayor

1 and her First Deputy and everyone at
2 OCF, they just understand I think
3 children and families at a deeper level
4 than probably anyone in City government
5 as they should, that's their job. But
6 we felt an incredible amount of
7 resources and support that I think was a
8 really good match to match our
9 Department in that world, especially
10 from the recreation side of what we do.

11 On the park side of what we do,
12 we work closely with OTIS,
13 Transportation, Infrastructure, right,
14 Sustainability and the Water Department.
15 But from the people side of what we do,
16 the merger of Parks and Recreation was a
17 merger of really people and places,
18 right. And so, from the people side of
19 what we do, to your point it's a massive
20 part of what we do. And it is different
21 from other cities because in other
22 cities you don't have this presence that
23 we have.

24 We are probably one of the most
25 public-facing City agencies in the City

1 of Philadelphia because we're
2 everywhere. And so, just having that
3 connection to communities and families
4 and children on an everyday, every hour
5 of every day level is something that
6 requires this heightened level of
7 leadership and support and I'm thrilled
8 that Deputy Mayor Figueroa has been able
9 to provide that with her team. And it's
10 just the beginning. We've only been
11 over there for a few months, but the
12 tremendous leadership that we've
13 received there has really been a
14 blessing for us.

15 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Okay. Very
16 good. Well, I'm glad to hear that the
17 additional resources are going in. But
18 what we want to see is as we fight for
19 dollars, we want to see as much
20 programming, as much activity. These
21 centers should be churning out
22 activities not around the clock, but we
23 want to see the investment and we want
24 to see opportunities for folks who live
25 in the neighborhood and who know these

1 kids to be engaged and connect with them
2 and to help along the way.

3 We understand a large part of
4 the workforce of Parks & Rec is civil
5 service, but we need to figure out how
6 do we also get folks who live in those
7 neighborhoods to be a part of the fabric
8 of what's happening because it is just
9 so grassroots and on the ground and
10 folks want to be connected.

11 So Councilwoman Brooks had a
12 question.

13 (No response.)

14 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Did we lose
15 her? Councilwoman Brooks.

16 (No response.)

17 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Okay.
18 We'll come back.

19 Councilman Thomas, are you
20 here?

21 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: I am,
22 Madam Chair. Thank you.

23 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Thank you.

24 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: I'm going
25 to be brief.

1 First of all thank you,
2 Commissioner. I appreciate the work
3 you're doing. Partnered with your
4 office on resource hubs and a number of
5 different initiatives. It's been great.
6 But I share the sense of urgency with a
7 lot of my colleagues with some of the
8 stuff that's being discussed today. So
9 I just have a couple of questions. I
10 don't want to beat a dead horse, so I do
11 agree that we need a sense of urgency
12 around cameras.

13 First thing, for the places
14 that we don't have cameras in place and
15 we know that we're not going to be able
16 to get them in place in time, what can
17 we do to supplement for the lack of
18 cameras as we prepare for the
19 summertime? Are there any suggestions,
20 recommendations? As Councilmembers, we
21 want to hear that. You have my word. I
22 agree with our Chair Councilmember Bass,
23 that we all need to be committed to
24 fighting for more money for Parks & Rec
25 and I am committed to that in this

1 budget cycle.

2 I'm curious to know if we do
3 know that there are going to be rec
4 centers where we can't have cameras in
5 place, what would you recommend or
6 suggest be there to supplement the lack
7 of cameras?

8 COMMISSIONER OTT LOVELL: I
9 think, Councilman Thomas, first of all
10 thank you so much for your leadership.
11 You've been extraordinary in terms of
12 just your interest in partnering with us
13 to actually provide those programs, as
14 the Chairwoman says, around the clock.
15 I've just been so inspired by your
16 office's commitment to partner with us
17 and connect us to just amazing resources
18 and partners, so thank you to you and
19 your whole time.

20 I don't mean to punt this, but
21 I do think that's a bigger question for
22 the Police Department. The truth is
23 cameras are not -- I'm not a law
24 enforcement professional, but my
25 understanding is that cameras are less

1 of a sort of proactive approach and
2 they're more reactive, so they're not a
3 deterrent as much as they're a way
4 that -- after a crime happens, there's a
5 way to capture that and I can tell you I
6 personally responded at 11 o'clock at
7 night at Christy and at Myers to provide
8 that surveillance data to the police and
9 it was incredibly helpful to them. So I
10 think it's an after-the-fact thing of
11 helping to solve the crime or get more
12 information about the crime as opposed
13 to a deterrent.

14 We haven't found it to be a
15 deterrent. If anything, the crime at
16 rec centers is increasing and we now
17 have 1500 cameras, right. So the more
18 cameras we add it's certainly not going
19 down, the crime. But I do know the
20 police has found it very helpful to
21 capture that data after the fact, so I
22 think that's more of a question for the
23 police as to what kind of supports they
24 might need to capture this information
25 at our sites.

1 We're not law enforcement
2 professionals and we're doing our best
3 here to keep kids safe and to care for
4 kids. What we do is we love kids. We
5 care for kids. We provide, as the
6 Chairwoman said, activities, activities
7 and programs to enrich kids' lives in a
8 positive way, but we don't fight crime.

9 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: I agree. I
10 agree 100 percent. I'm thinking about
11 the comfort of staff. I'm thinking
12 about people coming to work every single
13 day and making them feel comfortable.
14 So I 100 percent agree with everything
15 you're saying. I'm just wondering again
16 because we're having this conversation
17 and I want to make a fiscal commitment
18 to support you and provide what you
19 need. So I guess if that changes and
20 you think of maybe something that you
21 feel should be at rec centers that don't
22 have cameras, please let us know and we
23 would want to hear that.

24 The second thing -- and then
25 I'll pass it back to you, Madam Chair --

1 with all due respect, Commissioner, I
2 disagree with you about two staff
3 members at every rec center. I think
4 you need more. When you talk about two
5 staff members at every rec center, I'm
6 assuming you're talking about one
7 supervisor and one program person; is
8 that correct?

9 COMMISSIONER OTT LOVELL: Not
10 even that, Councilmember --

11 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: So it's a
12 supervisor and one part-time person?

13 COMMISSIONER OTT LOVELL: Yeah,
14 it's a seasonal person.

15 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: So,
16 Commissioner, I appreciate you being
17 fiscally conservative. I think that
18 that is the responsible thing to do with
19 the hat that you wear. But I would
20 appreciate if you maybe come back to us
21 and let us know how much it would cost
22 to kind of change those numbers. So I'm
23 thinking about some conversations that
24 I've had. I'm deep in the rec centers
25 so I'm always talking to staff there.

1 I think about a rec center like
2 what Councilmember Gauthier talked about
3 over in her District, there's no way we
4 can have two staff members at that rec
5 center. That has a pool there. It has
6 so many things going on. Two staff is
7 not going to get it.

8 Now, if we talk about another
9 small rec center even at Happy Hollow in
10 Councilmember Bass's District, which is
11 a smaller rec center, they still have
12 the boxing ring on the outside too. So
13 I know we have some rec centers that are
14 small in the City that might can get
15 away with the two staff members, but I
16 think that we should have at least
17 three, four staff members at our larger
18 rec centers in the City of Philadelphia
19 and then explore maybe what it looks
20 like to have some of the part-time staff
21 making sure rec centers are open until
22 8:30 and 9 o'clock at night and things
23 like that.

24 So if you could help us with
25 that, I would want to aim towards that.

1 I know that that's not the most fiscal
2 conservative goal, but I think when
3 we're going to see as it relates to the
4 amount of crowds and the amount of
5 people that are going to be using our
6 rec centers this summer because people
7 are going to be so anxious to get out
8 the house.

9 Also, Commissioner, I commend
10 you too because without you, we wouldn't
11 have pools. And I firsthand know all
12 the hurdles and obstacles that you had
13 to jump through to get your lifeguards
14 certified to make sure that our pools
15 can be open, so we don't even have to
16 put that on the record. But I know that
17 that was a difficult process. So just
18 anticipating the type of crowds and what
19 we're going to attract this summer, I
20 know you came into this right now. But
21 if you can get back to us and let us
22 know how much more money should we put
23 into Parks & Rec to get us more full-
24 time staff members as well as the one or
25 two part-time staff members you're

1 asking for, and then to assure that the
2 bigger rec centers have even more staff
3 than that, I think that would be a good
4 dream situation for us.

5 Thank you, Madam Chair. I
6 appreciate it.

7 COMMISSIONER OTT LOVELL: Madam
8 Chair, can I provide a point of
9 clarification?

10 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Certainly.

11 COMMISSIONER OTT LOVELL: So
12 just to be clear, that is our smaller
13 centers with the two staff. So our
14 larger centers, so right now we classify
15 our centers A through D. So our A
16 centers, Christy would be an A center.
17 It has a gym, it has a pool. It's a
18 large facility. So there are four full-
19 time staff at Christy, right.

20 So at our smaller centers like,
21 Madam Chair, the Stenton Park, right,
22 that's one. You've got Tom over there
23 by himself. Now, we're going to give
24 him a seasonal to make sure he has
25 someone over there with him. So at our

1 smaller centers, it might be two people.
2 But at our larger centers, especially
3 where we have gyms, you're going to find
4 there's three on average people at that
5 center.

6 Now, what I can do is I can
7 send you a staffing schedule if that
8 would be helpful, Madam Chair, of all
9 the centers and the --

10 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Absolutely.
11 Absolutely.

12 COMMISSIONER OTT LOVELL: And
13 staff that are assigned to each of those
14 centers. And we can separate that by
15 Council Districts, so you can get a
16 sense of who's at your centers, what
17 their title is, whether it's full-time,
18 part-time or seasonal staff. We can
19 send that information to you.

20 And then of course we staff up
21 in the summer, right. So when we're
22 running 130 summer camps and pools, you
23 might have 15 people at a center between
24 lifeguards, pool maintenance attendants,
25 seasonal maintenance staff. That's our

1 Superbowl season so we staff up. The
2 policy change that I was talking about
3 or the practice change that I was
4 talking about is that previously at
5 about 100 of our centers at any one
6 time, using Stenton Park as an example,
7 you might see Tom there by himself.
8 We're saying now that we don't want
9 anybody there by themselves so we're
10 going to have two people on, but the way
11 we're filling that in is through
12 seasonal support and those are
13 individuals we're hiring right from the
14 community to work at these centers to be
15 there as a presence while the supervisor
16 is on, is that supervisor is on by
17 themselves, if that's helpful.

18 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Thank you,
19 Commissioner. I appreciate it. And
20 again, if anything changes and you feel
21 like we need more staff at rec centers,
22 if you feel like we need more support,
23 please let us know because I think that
24 you're probably going to see the busiest
25 summer at rec centers coming out of this

1 pandemic than what we've seen in recent
2 history. So anything we can do to
3 support any more staffing and anything
4 like that outside of what's already
5 happening, please let us know and we're
6 here.

7 Thank you, Madam Chair.

8 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Thank you.

9 Thank you, Councilman. I think that
10 really sums up the sentiment of all of
11 Council, that we want to be of help. We
12 need to know what's necessary. We want
13 programs. We want services. Because
14 outside of as I said Police and DHS,
15 Parks and Recreation is really who we
16 look to, to keep our kids safe in the
17 City of Philadelphia.

18 Many of us look towards the
19 summer with a sense of anticipation
20 because everybody loves summer, but also
21 a sense of dread because we also know
22 that unfortunately there's a level of
23 violence which is up acceptable. So
24 thank you, Councilmember Thomas.

25 I just have one quick question

1 and then I'm going to ask Councilwoman
2 Brooks to ask her questions. And that
3 is, does Park & Recreation have a plan
4 for American Rescue Act dollars that are
5 coming into Philadelphia? Have you put
6 together any sort of a plan or what's
7 your thoughts on the funding that's
8 coming through, what the needs are of
9 the Department and how you might go
10 about securing those needs and making
11 your case for them?

12 COMMISSIONER OTT LOVELL: I
13 know almost nothing, Councilmember Bass,
14 about the Rescue funds. What we do is
15 we provide a budget to the Finance
16 Office, a proposed budget and that goes
17 through the City's budget process. So
18 that's what we do. We provide
19 information of our needs and our -- we
20 provide all the information the Budget
21 Office asks us to provide and that's how
22 that works for us.

23 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: I would
24 strongly suggest that you have your
25 budget people look at what some

1 additional needs might be and how they
2 can be addressed through that funding
3 that's going to be coming through. With
4 so many folks who are going to be paying
5 attention to the money coming in,
6 everybody's got a plan. And I would
7 like to see a plan for our children who
8 are going to be in these centers. So I
9 would hope that Parks & Rec could be
10 proactive in terms of anticipating that
11 some of these funds coming through
12 should be coming through your doors as
13 well.

14 COUNCILMAN JOHNSON: Madam
15 Chair.

16 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Yes,
17 Councilman.

18 COUNCILMAN JOHNSON: Can I get
19 a point of clarification just for a
20 moment?

21 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Certainly,
22 yes. Chair recognizes Councilmember
23 Johnson.

24 COUNCILMAN JOHNSON: So,
25 Commissioner, just in regards to the

1 question regarding relief dollars, can
2 you just give us an overview on -- and
3 you can just summarize it -- what your
4 budget needs look like. I mean, Parks &
5 Rec has never been restored since the
6 services have been cut under the Nutter
7 Administration. And so, what is your
8 fiscal ask that you're looking for in
9 this upcoming budget cycle that we as
10 Councilmen can take in consideration
11 when the relief dollars come down or
12 even separate than the relief dollars,
13 just the general budget that will be
14 presented to City Council in the
15 upcoming weeks?

16 COMMISSIONER OTT LOVELL: So I
17 appreciate the Councilman. I'm going to
18 have to ask you to pose that question to
19 the Finance and Budget Office. I'm not
20 trying to deflect. I'm just being as
21 candid as you all know me to be, which
22 is this is a challenging situation
23 you're putting us in.

24 We have presented both our
25 reductions and justifications to the

1 Budget Office. And I understand that
2 the situation the Administration is in,
3 in trying to accommodate all of the
4 needs across all departments in the City
5 of Philadelphia. I understand that. I
6 respect that and I appreciate that. And
7 so, we're really --

8 COUNCILMAN JOHNSON:

9 Commissioner, I'm going to push -- and,
10 Madam Chair, if you can just be patient
11 with me.

12 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Sure.

13 COUNCILMAN JOHNSON: I'm going
14 to push a little harder. My colleague
15 Councilmember Gauthier and myself target
16 around 15 million, right. And so, we
17 don't want you to be shy. Because for
18 us, we believe that part of our gun
19 violence prevention strategy should
20 include Parks & Rec that keeps our young
21 people safe. This is the reason why
22 Madam Chair is bringing this hearing
23 today.

24 And so, what is your budget ask
25 or you feel uncomfortable speaking on

1 the record as it relates to what you're
2 going to be coming and asking for in
3 terms of members of Council?

4 COMMISSIONER OTT LOVELL: What
5 I feel comfortable saying is you have to
6 address those questions to the Finance
7 and Budget Office for the City. We go
8 through the process that we go through
9 with the Budget Office to present
10 justifications for what we feel we need
11 in the Department and --

12 COUNCILMAN JOHNSON: What are
13 those needs, Commissioner? I think
14 that's what the question was and I think
15 that's what Councilmembers are asking.
16 Have you started your preliminary budget
17 requests that will come to Council in
18 these upcoming weeks and do you know
19 what that ballpark figure is?

20 COMMISSIONER OTT LOVELL: Yeah.
21 We have submitted requests to the Budget
22 Office. And if you will just allow me
23 to circle back with them and then we can
24 come back to you with that, I would be
25 grateful.

1 COUNCILWOMAN GAUTHIER: Point
2 of information, if I may.

3 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Chair
4 recognizes Councilwoman Gauthier.

5 COUNCILWOMAN GAUTHIER: I think
6 a good way to begin looking at this is
7 looking at what we cut last year which
8 was \$12 million from the Parks and
9 Recreation budget. And we know that
10 even last year we weren't where we
11 needed to be to really serve our
12 neighborhoods as well. So as Council,
13 I'm hoping that we can look at the
14 restoration and then put some money on
15 top of that that we think will get us
16 robust staffing and programming for our
17 neighborhoods at this time.

18 COUNCILWOMAN BASS:
19 Councilwoman, I appreciate your advocacy
20 for Parks and Recreation. But I really
21 think the Commissioner in her leadership
22 role, we really need for her to be the
23 voice that speaks for the Administration
24 and fights for these funds that we need
25 to see coming out of the General Fund

1 and into her budget.

2 So from Councilman Kenyatta
3 Johnson's question, I would just say
4 this, if you don't feel comfortable,
5 Commissioner, giving us a number or
6 laying it out for us, I would just
7 strongly urge you to make sure that you
8 communicate to your people to put
9 together a plan that even if they throw
10 the plan -- listen, if they put it
11 through the shredder, you've presented a
12 plan, you've presented an option.

13 I think we have to look beyond
14 just, well, maybe we'll get this or
15 hopefully we'll get that. I think we
16 have to look beyond that and we have to
17 fight for every dollar for our kids.
18 Because as I said before, this is not
19 about me. This is not about you. This
20 is not about any of these members on
21 Council. None of us is going to be on
22 those swings -- well, maybe some of us
23 are. But I'm not going to be on those
24 swings. It's a sight to see I'm sure,
25 if I was.

1 But for our kids who are going
2 to be there, for my 11-year-old that I
3 use my neighborhood playground, Pleasant
4 Playground, for and I want to take her,
5 I want to be safe. Everybody wants to
6 be safe. We all want these to be safe
7 spaces.

8 And so, with money coming in
9 and knowing that money is coming in, I'm
10 not saying you have to ask for, you
11 know, \$100 million or whatever. But you
12 should be in my opinion asking,
13 requesting, planning for something to
14 come through your door that is going to
15 keep our kids safe.

16 And, listen, maybe it is \$100
17 million and if it is, I'm fine with that
18 or more. But whatever it is, it's got
19 to be something. We've got to do some
20 planning, some forward-thinking about
21 what are we going to do to keep these
22 kids safe. And we know that there's a
23 large sum of money that's coming into
24 the City of Philadelphia. And how much
25 of it is going to Parks and Recreation,

1 you need a plan. You need a plan to get
2 some of that.

3 COMMISSIONER OTT LOVELL: Yeah.

4 So I want to be clear, we absolutely
5 have a plan. We call it Re-aligning as
6 We Rebuild. It's Goal 3 of our
7 Department's strategic plan. Not only
8 does it increase staffing at our
9 recreation centers, it does so with a
10 lens of racial equity across our entire
11 system. It reduces historic racial
12 disparities in terms of how we staff our
13 system. The theory in it is that we
14 want to move from staffing facilities
15 based on their size to staffing
16 communities based on their needs so
17 we absolutely --

18 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: So how much
19 is that? How much is that --

20 COMMISSIONER OTT LOVELL: I'd
21 have to get back to you exactly as to
22 what it would cost. We've been
23 implementing it on a gradual basis. So
24 this year we were able to salvage a bit
25 of our budget to begin to implement that

1 staffing re-alignment in three of our
2 districts which we hope to roll out in
3 the near term, and then we will need
4 additional funds to do that throughout
5 our system.

6 But I just wanted to respond to
7 your comment, Madam Chair, that yes, I
8 totally agree we need a plan. We have a
9 plan. I believe it's a very good
10 data-informed plan. And again, the
11 decisions around how much funding our
12 Department receives is above my pay
13 grade. So I just -- yeah.

14 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: So this is
15 a plan for the American Rescue Act
16 dollars if --

17 COMMISSIONER OTT LOVELL: No.
18 No, ma'am.

19 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: So that's
20 what I'm talking about. I'm talking
21 about we need a plan for that for our
22 kids. We need to sow some money into
23 our children. There's no question about
24 it and we need Parks & Rec to be at the
25 top.

1 As I said, we need the Police
2 Department. We need DHS, anyone who's
3 coming into contact with our young
4 people. DHS and then Parks and
5 Recreation should be right there. And
6 so, what does that look like for funding
7 for our departments. I'm not going to
8 beat a dead horse. I know we have some
9 other questions for Members. I can only
10 say it's a huge mistake not to plan for
11 the use of some of those dollars for our
12 children who are in crisis in the City
13 right now.

14 Councilwoman Brooks.

15 COUNCILMAN JOHNSON: Madam
16 Chair, if you don't mind, can I just
17 make one comment?

18 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Yes,
19 Councilman, if you want --

20 COUNCILMAN JOHNSON: You know
21 what, I will defer my time. I will
22 defer to Councilwoman Brooks when I have
23 my opportunity to speak.

24 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Okay. Very
25 good. Thank you, Councilman.

1 Councilwoman Brooks.

2 COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: Thank you
3 very much, Madam Chair.

4 My questions were -- most of
5 them were pretty much asked and kind of
6 spread out amongst my Council
7 colleagues. And I want to kind of talk
8 about this \$15 million to \$20 million
9 possibility that can go into Parks &
10 Rec.

11 And similar to my concern with
12 the conversation I had with the School
13 District of Philadelphia, is there any
14 way that these funds could be targeted
15 in the highest-hit zip codes where we
16 see the most gun violence and the most
17 incarceration of young folks in general?
18 So when we push, as many of my Council
19 colleagues on here are saying, we're
20 willing to push 15 million, 20 million,
21 whatever it takes, not just to restore
22 Parks & Rec but to push Parks & Rec
23 further.

24 And, Commissioner, you know
25 that I'm a Parks & Rec person. I come

1 out of Parks & Rec so I know the cost
2 for quality programming. I just want to
3 know and hear that when we push for
4 these funds, you said the racial equity
5 lens and I get that, but I also feel
6 that we need to do a huge push in
7 coordination with all of these services
8 in the hardest-hit zip codes through gun
9 violence, this pandemic and mass
10 incarceration if we're really talking
11 about seeing real change for young
12 people.

13 So the plan that you're
14 thinking, is that in consideration, what
15 will that look like? And as we push for
16 these funds, I just need to hear you say
17 that that's something we can make happen
18 because Stenton Park is my park. I know
19 Tom is there by himself all day.
20 Luckily, he had education that works
21 with him now doing the access center.
22 But still when Tom goes, I don't know
23 the other guys that come after Tom
24 leaves. But still, we have a beautiful
25 park. We need thriving programming and

1 we need that to happen immediately and
2 this plan needs to be enacted over the
3 next couple of weeks because summer is
4 coming. And I just need to hear that.

5 I heard your urgency, but I
6 just need to hear that that's something
7 we can make happen last night or the
8 night before last. We lost three or --
9 I forgot the number, three or
10 four people to gun violence, whether it
11 was death, involvement or lives changed
12 forever and they're all young folks out
13 of my community and I need to make sure
14 that the next generation has something
15 else to look forward to, and I see Parks
16 & Rec as one of those tools.

17 COMMISSIONER OTT LOVELL: Thank
18 you, Councilmember. Thank you also for
19 your great leadership and great
20 understanding of the power of Parks &
21 Rec to lift up our City and our
22 communities. I do believe that the plan
23 that we have in place that we've worked
24 incredibly hard on, I want to be clear
25 that the plan called Re-aligning as we

1 Rebuild was not just worked on by
2 leadership. It was worked on by the
3 rank-and-file of our staff for every two
4 weeks for 10 months. And it was
5 data-informed. So using data from
6 equity data, health data, crime data
7 that we presented in the beginning of
8 this hearing around these crime reports,
9 also amenity data, the types of
10 amenities at a site, population data
11 informed us, basically giving us a score
12 to each of our centers based on that
13 data, what we call a priority score.

14 And the idea in this plan is
15 that we would create community service
16 areas that would basically serve an
17 entire community with programming. So
18 why do we have parks throughout our City
19 that are not programmed, right. Why do
20 we have centers that are small and
21 considered a D center so they don't have
22 staff, therefore they don't give out
23 meals. So the idea is to change that
24 mindset through this plan and through
25 this data-driven approach giving scores

1 to our centers and then assigning a
2 staffing complement based on that score
3 as opposed to just the size of a
4 facility or what the facility has
5 historically gotten in terms of
6 staffing.

7 It's a very significantly
8 different approach than we've ever taken
9 in the Department. It's something we
10 feel really passionately about and I
11 think it would address much of what I
12 heard today, so that is something we
13 stand ready to implement. Our goal was
14 to implement it three districts at a
15 time so that we could continue to
16 evaluate it as we implement. Our
17 first -- not three Council Districts,
18 three Parks & Rec districts at a time.
19 We have 10 Parks & Rec districts that
20 aren't exactly aligned with the Council
21 Districts geographically. That was our
22 goal, to roll it out that way depending
23 on the funding that we received to
24 implement that plan, but it does involve
25 increased staffing, increased programs,

1 better coordination with local community
2 organizations. It's a pretty robust
3 plan.

4 COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: Is that
5 something that we can see because I
6 would like to see what it looks like?
7 Can you get a copy over to my office,
8 please?

9 COMMISSIONER OTT LOVELL:
10 Absolutely.

11 COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: Thank
12 you.

13 Madam Chair, that ends my line
14 of questioning.

15 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Thank you,
16 Council Lady.

17 Councilman Kenyatta Johnson
18 next up.

19 COUNCILMAN JOHNSON: Thank you,
20 Councilwoman Bass, Madam Chair, and also
21 just thank you for doing this hearing.

22 First and foremost,
23 Commissioner, I just want to acknowledge
24 the work that you have done throughout
25 my District, particularly around just

1 creating safe spaces for our young
2 people. And so, for me it's imperative
3 that when we talk about Parks & Rec and
4 the programming, that's what one of my
5 colleagues just talked about, the
6 programming I think is essential when we
7 talk about violence prevention and most
8 importantly, creating the safe spaces
9 for our young people during this
10 upcoming summer.

11 And so, the reason why I
12 continue to press around, as
13 Councilwoman Gauthier just touched on,
14 the cuts that have taken place during
15 not even just prior to the pandemic, but
16 also under the Nutter Administration
17 because those cuts significantly impact
18 young people that wouldn't have anything
19 else to do during these summer hours.

20 And so, as we see this level of
21 gun violence that is taking place in the
22 City of Philadelphia right now, most
23 people that I have run into contact
24 with, and I've been doing a tour at all
25 of my rec centers, Peace not Guns tour,

1 to particularly organize people inside
2 the neighborhood to partner with Parks &
3 Rec at those rec centers. So they can
4 be the people that's actually
5 patrolling. Because obviously, I want
6 to make sure that we have the cameras at
7 key particular sites where we see high
8 instance of crime and violence, but also
9 want to make sure that we're being
10 proactive and organizing the community
11 to step up to the plate and that they're
12 allowed to partner with Parks & Rec and
13 utilize the space, right, then hopefully
14 we can have a level of impact on the gun
15 violence that we're seeing, but also a
16 partnership with the Police Department
17 to make sure that they have a presence
18 during those high peak times just to
19 deter anyone if they decide to come on
20 the basketball court or on the
21 playground or any of that nonsense that
22 we have been seeing.

23 And so, for me I just want you
24 to clarify a couple of things. And I'm
25 an advocate of making sure we increase

1 this budget, right. But I also want to
2 make sure we talk about the racial
3 equity lens because I do want to zero in
4 on how we hire individuals. I know
5 civil service for me is an obstacle when
6 it comes to regular people from the
7 neighborhood having the opportunity to
8 work at these sites.

9 I do know there's opportunities
10 I guess through seasonal hiring, but I
11 want to see how can we increase local
12 people of being hired and have that
13 opportunity to work in the rec center,
14 because that plays a major role in
15 deterring young people that they know
16 from at least coming into the park with
17 the nonsense. So can you give me an
18 overview on the plan and strategy?

19 And I do want to say publicly
20 that I do view this as a violence
21 prevention. Parks & Rec is part of a
22 long-term violence prevention strategy,
23 keeping our young people occupied.
24 Because once the Parks and Recreation
25 centers were shut down and then the

1 schools were shut down, what else are
2 the kids going to do. So my grandmother
3 always taught me an idle mind is the
4 devil's workshop so we're going to do
5 what we do because it's nothing else to
6 do.

7 So give me your perspective on
8 that in terms of a racial equity lens
9 standpoint and then your overall
10 strategy on -- and you talked on it a
11 couple of times. But from our
12 prevention standpoint keeping our young
13 people occupied in terms of specifically
14 programming.

15 COMMISSIONER OTT LOVELL: Yeah.
16 So I know I've talked a little bit in
17 previous hearings about our struggles
18 with the civil service process, but I
19 will say that I'm really proud of some
20 work that we've done over the last two
21 years to completely overhaul how we hire
22 our recreation leaders, recreation
23 leader trainees. I think it's one of
24 the most significant things we've done
25 over the last few years at Parks & Rec,

1 and I know it's something at the Mayor's
2 Office of Inclusion and Diversity is
3 pretty proud of as well.

4 We recognize at least on the
5 program side of what we do those 300
6 recreation leaders that we were really
7 challenged in terms of the racial
8 diversity and also the geographic
9 diversity of where those individuals
10 were coming from and the way that that
11 moves up into the pipeline of management
12 in our Department because it's all
13 promotional, you know, was incredibly
14 disconcerting as well because most of
15 the managers in our Department were
16 nondiverse as well.

17 So it really was clear to me
18 that in order to fix that, we have to
19 start with fixing how we hire recreation
20 leader trainees, which is the
21 entry-level position into our Department
22 on the program side. So two years ago
23 we worked with the Office of Human
24 Resources to completely change how we
25 hire our rec leaders. Through the civil

1 service process, I want to be clear that
2 we absolutely run this through the civil
3 process. But I think it's a model
4 moving forward for how you can make
5 change within the civil service
6 parameters.

7 So if I have a few minutes, I
8 can tell you about that process. First,
9 we changed the specs. So we changed the
10 specification for the position to cast a
11 wider net. For instance, you could have
12 applied and didn't qualify if you had a
13 major in dance, but not education. So
14 we changed the specifications to allow
15 for more experience over a different
16 kind of education and then to allow a
17 wider range of backgrounds, majors that
18 you could apply with.

19 And then we cast a wide net in
20 terms of a recruitment effort. We had
21 never recruited. The City doesn't
22 really recruit proactively for its
23 positions. And so, we first went to our
24 seasonal base which is credibly diverse
25 because we have thousands of seasonals

1 that work for us and they come from the
2 communities. And so, we went there
3 first and we asked for staff to identify
4 sort of our all-star seasonals who would
5 qualify for this position.

6 We held information sessions in
7 communities in recreation centers to
8 tell people about how to become a
9 recreation leader. And then at those
10 information sessions we actually set
11 people up on a computer to go in and
12 create an account in the City's system.
13 It's very mystifying. I don't know if
14 anyone here has ever applied for a civil
15 service job but it's mystifying. And
16 so, we broke that down for folks. And
17 then we were sort of an advocate or
18 navigator for them throughout the
19 process.

20 We reached out to all of the
21 HBCUs who had appropriate majors where
22 kids would qualify for this, so we
23 changed the spec. We changed how we
24 recruited and then we changed the test.
25 It was a written examination, like

1 100-question written examination. We
2 changed it to an oral examination so
3 more like an interview and we had our
4 own individuals help to create -- our
5 staff to create the test and also become
6 the raters for the test.

7 And then the last thing that we
8 did is we hired on a timely basis, so it
9 didn't take people a year to get hired.
10 We were actually were able to hire them
11 within three months of being called for
12 the test. And I'm happy to say that
13 from that process in 2019, we increased
14 people of color on our eligibility list
15 by 60 percent.

16 And when you look at the new
17 rec leaders, we've been able to hire 26
18 of them off that list. They are
19 incredibly diverse, not just from a
20 racial standpoint but their inclination
21 towards the work is amazingly positive,
22 so we feel that we got this right on a
23 number of different levels.

24 So we just are going through
25 the same process now since that list is

1 expiring to do that whole process again,
2 and I really do believe that we're
3 changing the face of the recreation
4 leader for the future in Parks & Rec.
5 So we're still going to continue to work
6 on it, but it's definitely something
7 we're proud of.

8 The other question about
9 programming and Parks and Recreation
10 being a key around anti-violence
11 programming, we agree 150 percent and I
12 totally agree with you that we've
13 learned a lesson over the last 11 months
14 when you significantly reduce a budget
15 and you -- with that reduction in
16 budget, we lost 1200 seasonal positions,
17 that included the pool staff but also
18 afterschool program staff and summer
19 camp staff and that meant those people
20 were out of work, so those people come
21 from these communities.

22 So when you have a lack of jobs
23 and a lack of, you know, when you close
24 rec centers and take down rims at
25 basketball courts and kids aren't at

1 school, it's a recipe for some really
2 negative implications and I think we've
3 seen that. And I have a presentation
4 that I'm giving as part of the next
5 resolution that I hope will demonstrate
6 what we've tried to do over the last
7 year to turn that tide, right, amidst
8 the pandemic and what we're committed to
9 do moving forward for the summer.

10 We're planning a massive summer
11 with a lot of partners. Councilman
12 Johnson, I totally agree with you that
13 the more we can get the word out and the
14 more that you and your colleagues can
15 help us to tell these community
16 organizations that we welcome them into
17 these recreation centers.

18 We have the space. We have the
19 kids. We want them to come in and help
20 us program these centers. Not every
21 program needs to be run by a recreation
22 leader. We can permit space and we do,
23 at every facility, to have people come
24 in and use those facilities to help
25 support their own programs and to do

1 their own outreach. We welcome that and
2 we want to support that in any way that
3 we can. That was a long answer.

4 COUNCILMAN JOHNSON: No, that
5 was the answer that I was looking for in
6 terms of information. And then again, I
7 just want to circle back regarding the
8 12 million that was cut. And we'll have
9 an opportunity to do a deeper dive
10 during the budget hearing, and you
11 touched on it, but again the type of
12 staffing that was cut, the impact that
13 it has on programming and the impact it
14 even had on capital improvements as well
15 because that's a role.

16 The reason why I rebuilt about
17 90, 95 percent of every rec center
18 inside the 2nd Councilmanic District is
19 because as a kid if we wanted to go to a
20 nice park, we didn't go in the
21 neighborhood. I grew up in Point
22 Breeze, but we would go over to Markward
23 which we called Taneyville because it
24 was just a better playground as opposed
25 to staying at Chew Playground, even

1 though I did go to Chew Playground for
2 summer camp and still enjoyed myself,
3 but the nicer playgrounds were in other
4 areas, right, that were more fluid.

5 And so, we'll do a deeper dive
6 regarding this budget. Again, I support
7 what Madam Chair said as it relates to
8 the Administration looking at, okay, if
9 there are COVID relief funds that are
10 coming, and they are coming, more than
11 \$1 billion over two years, how is that
12 funding prioritizing from a gun violence
13 strategy standpoint young people who
14 participate in Parks & Rec.

15 And I'll wrap up on this, I was
16 at Wharton Square Park yesterday with my
17 two sons. It was a beautiful day.
18 Picked them up from school. Okay, let's
19 just go hang out, let them enjoy
20 themselves, right. And there were other
21 kids who were also playing over there
22 and other parents as well. And it just
23 reiterates how critically important it
24 is that when we have safe places for our
25 young people to enjoy themselves as well

1 as families, because it was a family day
2 as well.

3 And so, I was thinking about I
4 grew up in South Philly, but now I'm a
5 dad and I got my two sons with me. And
6 I'm paying attention just to make sure
7 nothing really kicks off. I got my eyes
8 open. I'm a little more alert than I
9 normally was. But again, this is why
10 it's critically important that I think
11 all of us are talking about the issue of
12 safety inside our recreation centers,
13 inside our playgrounds as well as our
14 parks.

15 And so thank you, Madam Chair
16 for your time. Commissioner, I look
17 forward to doing additional follow-up
18 regarding the key areas around the
19 budget and again, making sure our young
20 people are safe this upcoming summer.
21 Thank you very much.

22 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Thank you,
23 Councilman. Thank you for your comments
24 and questions. It was very important
25 information that we were able to garner

1 from your questioning, particularly
2 around staffing, and what the history
3 was, what's being done now and how we
4 can proceed to really engage folks who
5 otherwise might not have been engaged.
6 So thank you so much, Councilman. Thank
7 you for --

8 COUNCILMAN JOHNSON: Madam
9 Chair. Madam Chair.

10 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Yes.

11 COUNCILMAN JOHNSON: If you
12 don't mind, I just want to add one last
13 part to my comment as well.

14 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Certainly.

15 COUNCILMAN JOHNSON:
16 Commissioner, I just want to also see if
17 you and your team as time goes along can
18 look at -- diversity and hiring is one
19 thing but also cultural sensitivity,
20 right, that the staff who are placed
21 inside -- because a lot of them that do
22 civil service they have degrees and the
23 neighborhood people don't have those
24 degrees so they probably can't move up,
25 but the neighborhood people are the

1 backbone.

2 And so, it's like the person
3 with the degree that doesn't come from
4 the neighborhood is kind of coming and
5 changing, if I can say it, they're kind
6 of gentrifying what recreational center
7 programming looks like. I'm just going
8 to be upfront and just say that.

9 And so, there's a cultural
10 sensitivity standpoint because if you
11 have programming that doesn't reflect
12 the indigenous people that live inside
13 the neighborhood who always lived there
14 but you have programs that's geared more
15 towards new residents that live inside
16 the area, that's a problem. And so,
17 it's something that I pay attention to.

18 But I think in terms of a Park
19 & Rec system, something that could also
20 be incorporated into how you bring
21 people on and inform them from a
22 cultural sensitivity standpoint is if
23 you're going into someone else's
24 neighborhood, if they like basketball,
25 support them doing basketball. If they

1 like hip hop, let them do hip hop. If
2 they want to do African drumming, let
3 them do African drumming. Everybody
4 doesn't want to do basket weaving,
5 right.

6 And so, those are the type of
7 things that I believe when people are
8 hired in terms of their background to
9 think about. And no different than if
10 somebody from South Philadelphia who is
11 African-American who somehow winds up in
12 the Northeast. Okay. They may play
13 hockey. They may play soccer, right.
14 They may play basketball, right. And
15 I'm quite sure the neighbors and the
16 parents wouldn't want somebody to come
17 in and totally just change it up and
18 say, well, everybody's planning
19 basketball and we don't do those other
20 types of programming. So I just wanted
21 to put that out there from a staffing
22 and programming standpoint. And,
23 Commissioner, you take care and keep up
24 the good work. Bye-bye.

25 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Thank you,

1 Councilman. Thanks again.

2 Councilwoman Jamie Gauthier.

3 Chair recognizes Councilwoman Gauthier.

4 COUNCILWOMAN GAUTHIER: I don't
5 have anything, Madam Chair. I think
6 that was an old --

7 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Okay. All
8 right. Very good.

9 Is there anyone else who would
10 like to offer testimony or make a
11 statement regarding Resolution No.
12 210199?

13 (No response.)

14 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Let me
15 double-check the chat. I don't see
16 anyone.

17 With that being said, Madam
18 Clerk, can we have you read the title of
19 the next resolution.

20 MR. BESSLER: I apologize. I
21 had my hand up for testimony.

22 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Oh, I do
23 apologize. Please --

24 MR. BESSLER: It's okay. You
25 apologized right when I was raising my

1 hand.

2 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Okay.

3 Thank you. Please state your name for
4 the record and proceed with your
5 testimony.

6 MR. BESSLER: My name is Brett
7 Bessler. I am a Recreation Leader 1 and
8 Shop Steward for D.C. 74 Local 2187
9 within Philadelphia Parks and Recreation
10 system. First, I would like to thank
11 the Committee for discussing this
12 crucial initiative of camera
13 installations for our playground and
14 recreation centers.

15 Additionally, I also would
16 thank the Committee for providing this
17 avenue for rank-and-file 2187 members to
18 provide their own personal experiences
19 when it comes to this initiative. As I
20 said before, I'm a recreation leader for
21 PPR and facilitate a playground and rec
22 center in the Point Breeze neighborhood
23 of South Philadelphia.

24 Every day our facility and
25 staff volunteers work tirelessly to

1 provide a welcoming and vibrant public
2 space for our community. Children can
3 play at our state-of-the-art play
4 equipment, teens can enjoy and grow
5 through our youth development
6 programming and seniors can sit back and
7 relax to the sound of an outdoor jazz
8 ensemble basking in the glow of a South
9 Philadelphia sunset.

10 On the evening of May 19, 2019,
11 an evening much like I just described,
12 our sacred community space was invaded
13 by sounds of gunfire. As the only staff
14 on site, I immediately did what I was
15 trained to do in an active shooter
16 situation. I secured my afterschool
17 children in our safe room, went on
18 lockdown and called the police.

19 Fortunately, when the shooting
20 had occurred, no one was struck by any
21 bullets. But as the chaos of roughly 80
22 citizens running from our playground
23 ensued, staff was unable to obtain much
24 information about the actual incident or
25 persons involved. When police arrived,

1 I informed them of the little
2 information I personally knew and took
3 them to view our playground security
4 footage.

5 Within moments, PPD were able
6 to have a full description of those
7 involved and the vehicle that they fled
8 in. The suspects were later apprehended
9 and charged thanks to our security
10 systems footage. Throughout the years
11 with PPR, I have grown to learn how
12 valuable this extra set of 24/7 eyes can
13 be. Not because of my experience with
14 the positive effects of having security
15 cameras, but my experiences with not
16 having them has been harrowing to say
17 the least.

18 One example, one evening in
19 just my second year of working with PPR
20 at a recreation center in Northwest
21 Philadelphia, roughly 30 youth began to
22 chase two individuals throughout our
23 park and into our facility. This group
24 caught up with these two individuals in
25 our main hallway and began beating them,

1 kicking and punching these two youth as
2 they tried to shield their heads from
3 the blows.

4 I again working alone called
5 emergency response and after what felt
6 like an eternity but was probably 10 to
7 15 seconds of pleading for them just to
8 stop, they all ran from the facility,
9 including the two individuals that were
10 bloodied from just being attacked.

11 When emergency response
12 arrived, I did my best to share as much
13 information as I could. But because we
14 did not have security cameras, there was
15 not much we could do. All I wanted to
16 do that night was help those two youth
17 that were attacked to the best of my
18 ability. But because we did not have
19 the information a security camera system
20 could provide, we were unable to
21 identify anyone involved or were even
22 able to answer the simple question of
23 which way did they go.

24 It is my hope that those two
25 youth do not see that facility as a

1 constant reminder of this traumatic
2 event, but I can understand why they
3 would. I and my fellow coworkers look
4 forward to the day when we will have
5 security systems at all of our
6 playgrounds and recreation centers.
7 There is no downside to having this base
8 level of security for our community
9 spaces. Security cameras can help deter
10 crime, but really show their true value
11 when our public spaces are disrupted by
12 acts of violence. With these systems,
13 we can assure an adequate level of
14 response to these incidents and the
15 communities we are tasked with keeping
16 safe. Thank you.

17 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Well, thank
18 you so much for your testimony. It's
19 right on point with exactly why we
20 wanted to have this hearing, which is to
21 find out what missed opportunities, for
22 lack of better terms, were there with
23 cameras not being in place.

24 And I think that what you spoke
25 about, the incident that you spoke about

1 in which there was one with cameras and
2 one without really just puts it out
3 there. It lays all the information
4 there that we need cameras. These
5 cameras are not optional.

6 I think that if we had cameras
7 in place when we had expected to have
8 cameras in place, then the incident in
9 which you described with the two young
10 people being attacked, we would have
11 been able to address that. We would
12 have been able to figure out who it was,
13 what happened, who the culprits were,
14 identify them and address it
15 appropriately. So when I say that there
16 needs to be a sense of urgency around
17 placing these cameras, it's not to
18 attack anyone or to put anyone on the
19 spot, but it is to say that this is an
20 important safety feature that is long
21 overdue in our parks and recreation
22 system, so thank you for your testimony
23 today.

24 MR. BESSLER: Thank you.

25 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Thank you

1 for being here.

2 Is there anyone else here to
3 testify on Resolution 210199?

4 (No response.)

5 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: And I don't
6 see any hands raised or any information
7 in the chat. So if we could have Madam
8 Clerk call the next resolution and
9 witnesses to testify.

10 THE CLERK: Resolution 210198,
11 a resolution authorizing the Committee
12 of Parks, Recreation and Cultural
13 Affairs to hold hearings to obtain an
14 update on the status of the City's plan
15 to ensure all parks or playgrounds owned
16 or controlled by the City of
17 Philadelphia are inclusive,
18 intergenerational and accessible for all
19 disabilities and special needs.

20 And the first panel is Aparna
21 Palantino, Deputy Commissioner for
22 Capital Infrastructure and Natural Land
23 Management of the Department of Parks
24 and Recreation and Kathryn Ott Lovell,
25 Commissioner of the Department of Parks

1 and Recreation.

2 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Very good.

3 If we could have you ladies state your
4 name for the record and proceed with
5 your testimony.

6 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PALANTINO:

7 Aparna Palantino. Good morning,
8 Chairperson Bass and members of the
9 Committee on Parks, Recreation and
10 Cultural Affairs. My name is Aparna
11 Palantino and I serve as the Deputy
12 Commissioner of Parks and Recreation for
13 Capital Infrastructure and Natural Land
14 Management. With me today is
15 Commissioner Kathryn Ott Lovell who will
16 testify on our Department's COVID-19
17 general reopening plans as requested by
18 this Committee.

19 In terms of process, I will
20 first testify on behalf of our
21 Department on the subject of Resolution
22 No. 210198. The status of our parks and
23 playgrounds with regards to inclusivity,
24 intergenerational futures and
25 accessibility for individuals with

1 disabilities and special needs.

2 Since 2016, 54 of our
3 playgrounds across all City Council
4 Districts have undergone some form of
5 accessibility renovations. The specific
6 listing of these 54 playground sites
7 with detailed inclusivity highlights
8 have been provided to this Committee as
9 an Excel spreadsheet labeled Installed
10 Playground List Since 2016. We are
11 proud of the work we've accomplished
12 over the past five years to ensure that
13 our playgrounds are accessible for all
14 users, but clearly more work needs to be
15 done to bring all parks and recreation
16 playgrounds up to acceptable
17 accessibility standards. Additional
18 City Council and capital funding is
19 critical to accomplish this critical
20 goal.

21 With regards to the
22 intergenerational facilities, we work in
23 close partnership with Councilmembers
24 and communities to identify the type of
25 adult fitness equipment or features

1 desired at each site. Our Department is
2 also working to create an inclusion
3 service delivery design for all of our
4 playgrounds to better deserve and build
5 inclusive programming for all
6 individuals with disabilities. This
7 delivery design includes program
8 assessments, professional development
9 for staff as well as the creation of new
10 program standards for neurodiversity.
11 Through these efforts, our program which
12 shifts from place-based support to
13 system-wide support and programming for
14 differently abled individuals,
15 inclusivity at all of our playgrounds
16 remains the Department's goal.

17 We are committed to working
18 with City Council to both identify
19 priority sites and secure funding as
20 needed. To this end, we have formed new
21 partnerships with a variety of entities,
22 including Jefferson Hospital
23 Occupational Therapy, the Eagles Autism
24 Challenge and the Mayor's Office of
25 Diversity and Inclusion.

1 Funding and physical site
2 constraints remain our two biggest
3 challenges to successfully overcoming
4 inclusivity and accessibility obstacles
5 for all citizens. At the conclusion of
6 the second part of this testimony by
7 Commissioner Ott Lovell on our COVID-
8 reopening plans and trainings, I would
9 be happy to answer any questions on the
10 details of inclusive playgrounds. Thank
11 you.

12 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Thank you
13 for your testimony.

14 If we could now hear from the
15 Commissioner.

16 COMMISSIONER OTT LOVELL: Yes.
17 Thank you.

18 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Thank you.
19 Commissioner, do you have testimony?

20 COMMISSIONER OTT LOVELL: Yes,
21 ma'am. Sorry. I was just pulling it
22 up.

23 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: That's all
24 right.

25 COMMISSIONER OTT LOVELL: Good

1 morning, members of the Committee. My
2 name is Kathryn Ott Lovell and I am the
3 Commissioner of the Department of Parks
4 & Recreation. As specifically
5 requested, I'm here today to present
6 information on our Department's 2020 and
7 2021 COVID-19 reopening plans as well as
8 standard operating procedures and
9 protocols.

10 I would call to your attention
11 the previously provided information
12 labeled 4-9 Parks and Recreation
13 Reopenings and COVID Protocols as
14 submitted to Council. First, we are
15 proud to report that all parks were open
16 and remain so during the pandemic. We
17 trained 83 social distancing ambassadors
18 to distribute masks, COVID-19 safety
19 cards and to track usage and trash in
20 all parks throughout the pandemic.

21 Second, all playgrounds and
22 basketball courts are open for the
23 public for use. Third, we are planning
24 for a full complement of summer
25 programming and we plan to offer 120

1 summer camps at least city-wide from
2 July 6th through August 13th. Fourth,
3 it is our hope that all pools will open
4 on time this summer after the normal
5 necessary maintenance work is completed
6 and over 400 lifeguards are hired to
7 staff those pools. We will also operate
8 over 300 PlayStreets and open over 100
9 spraygrounds.

10 Last, since September of 2020,
11 40 of our recreation centers have been
12 serving as access centers, which provide
13 safe online learning experiences as
14 virtual classrooms for those children in
15 need of Internet access.

16 I would like to now quickly
17 highlight some slides in PowerPoint, our
18 pandemic year-end review. The main
19 theme of our work and our
20 accomplishments as a Department will
21 clearly show that Parks and Recreation
22 is an essential service provider,
23 particularly for communities of color,
24 for educational access, recreation,
25 athletics, meals, outdoor exercise and

1 other key life amenities.

2 I'm going to pull up that
3 presentation. Bear with me. Can people
4 see this? Maybe someone can let me
5 know.

6 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PALANTINO:
7 Yes.

8 COMMISSIONER OTT LOVELL: Okay.
9 Thank you. So this is just a
10 presentation to give everyone a sense of
11 what Parks & Rec has been doing
12 throughout the pandemic and what our
13 plans are in the near future. So does
14 everyone see a screen that says a
15 pandemic year-in review?

16 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: I have a
17 blank screen. I don't have that.

18 COMMISSIONER OTT LOVELL: You
19 don't have that, okay. Can IT --
20 because I see it up on my screen.

21 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: I see it
22 now. I see it now.

23 COMMISSIONER OTT LOVELL: Okay.
24 Great. Just let me know if you don't
25 see this continually.

1 So in March of 2020 before
2 COVID hit our City and our world, we
3 were poised to receive a very historic
4 for us increase, a programmatic increase
5 in our FY21 budget in the Mayor's budget
6 address, so we were very exited and that
7 was going to allow us to begin to
8 implement our re-aligning as we rebuild
9 new staffing structure. However, COVID
10 then hit our City and with all of the
11 revenue cuts that we were faced with, as
12 we all know the City introduced a new
13 budget in May and that budget cut our
14 funding by a full 20 percent. So our
15 capital budget was also reduced. We
16 lost thousands of seasonal positions,
17 which included some pool positions
18 because the pool season was canceled,
19 The Dell season was canceled. We had to
20 reduce our mowing cycles. We eliminated
21 full programs, including our computer
22 labs as well as our workforce
23 development program. However, I want to
24 be clear that Parks and Recreation staff
25 never stopped working.

1 We assigned our staff, all of
2 our recreation leaders to work at the
3 City's food warehouse where they spent
4 hours every single day on shifts packing
5 food boxes. We then turned 14
6 recreation centers into food pantries,
7 where these boxes were distributed to
8 communities every single day. Almost
9 100,000 food boxes were distributed at
10 our recreation centers and those boxes
11 were packed by recreation leaders at the
12 City's food warehouse.

13 We also continued to do meal
14 distribution at our reaction centers
15 every day because children were not
16 receiving those meals at schools. We
17 continued to give out meals at our older
18 adult centers and we assigned our staff
19 to work at schools distributing meals
20 there as well. We distributed a total
21 of 50,000 meals through the older adult
22 centers and over 1 million meals through
23 the recreation centers.

24 As we know, we saw a massive
25 increase in park usage during COVID-19.

1 We estimate based on the trash that we
2 picked up that there was about a
3 50-percent increase in visitors to park.
4 We saw a 1,300 percent increase in bike
5 and recreational traffic along MLK Drive
6 and we had a wonderful program as I
7 mentioned where we actually trained our
8 staff, so people who could not work
9 where they were assigned to work like
10 our water safety instructors and some of
11 our recreation leaders and our assistant
12 recreation leaders, we trained them to
13 become social distance ambassadors to
14 distribute free face masks and
15 information to park users.

16 I'm being told my slides aren't
17 moving; is that right?

18 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PALANTINO:
19 They aren't moving, Kathryn. This is
20 Aparna.

21 COMMISSIONER OTT LOVELL: Okay.
22 Can you see it now? Are they moving
23 now?

24 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PALANTINO:
25 The first slide is still up, the cover.

1 COMMISSIONER OTT LOVELL: Okay.
2 They're moving on my screen. What do
3 you see now? Sorry, everybody. It's so
4 complicated.

5 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PALANTINO:
6 Actually --

7 COMMISSIONER OTT LOVELL: Do
8 you see it now?

9 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PALANTINO:
10 No.

11 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: I see it
12 now.

13 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: I do.
14 It just changed.

15 COMMISSIONER OTT LOVELL: I
16 think I was doing it wrong. I think
17 that's my fault, guys. I was doing it
18 on my computer and not in the Teams. So
19 hopefully this will work now. So this
20 is the slide I was just talking about.
21 Does everyone see this? It's a
22 gentleman with his dog.

23 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Yes.

24 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Yes.

25 COMMISSIONER OTT LOVELL: Okay.

1 So this outlines everything I just
2 talked about in terms of some of the
3 cuts that we took when the budget was
4 revised. This demonstrates the response
5 in terms of food access and our
6 recreation leaders and other staff
7 working at the food warehouse. And this
8 is the slide where I was speaking about
9 the increase in park usage, the closure
10 of MLK Drive and the social distance
11 ambassador campaign.

12 We also had a huge effort to
13 get signage installed around our system
14 like we've never had to do before, so
15 making sure that people who are using
16 the parks understood what the protocols
17 needed to be, so mask-wearing, social
18 distancing, hand-sanitizing. We put up
19 laminated signs. And this was all hands
20 on deck. Everybody on their team was
21 out there putting up signs in English
22 and in Spanish. We ended up using lawn
23 signs, which was very effective for the
24 parks and just made sure that everybody
25 knew what to do.

1 We also took down 800
2 basketball rims at one point and then
3 had to put them all back up, which was a
4 massive effort for our skilled trades
5 team. And then our staff were
6 absolutely incredible, and Brett Bessler
7 who testified just a few minutes ago,
8 has been a great partner in this, and
9 that is a virtual programming
10 initiative. And -- are these still not
11 moving? Is anyone watching?

12 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PALANTINO:
13 I see Slide 6.

14 COMMISSIONER OTT LOVELL: Okay.
15 Good. Thank you. So we started
16 something called Parks & Rec At Home
17 which is a virtual programming
18 initiative that we had, almost 300 staff
19 participated. This was a way for staff
20 while people were at home, children and
21 families were at home, it was a way for
22 our staff to stay connected to families
23 but also to demonstrate some interest
24 that they had and to host programs that
25 could keep young people and older people

1 engaged, and this was a hugely popular
2 program.

3 Then we moved into summer, and
4 we knew that working with the Office of
5 Children and Families and so many
6 partners that we needed to have a robust
7 summer for kids even in the midst of a
8 pandemic. So we made the really
9 difficult decision to continue to host
10 summer camps and we did that. We hosted
11 100 summer camps for almost 2,000
12 campers. We opened 105 spraygrounds and
13 we did this lockstep with the Department
14 of Health making sure we had appropriate
15 procedures in place.

16 I'm very proud to say that we
17 only had one confirmed COVID case during
18 the last week of camp in all of those
19 camps. We also employed teenagers
20 during the pandemic. Much of the
21 WorkReady positions in the City went
22 virtual last summer. But at Parks &
23 Rec, we physically hired 769 teenagers
24 to work at our summer camps.

25 We got positions through

1 another program called SLIP, where we
2 were able to hire 19- to 24-year-olds.
3 175 19- to 24-year-olds from the
4 communities to work at our PlayStreets
5 and at our camps. So our PlayStreets
6 are a very unique thing to Philadelphia,
7 in that they have been a meal
8 distribution program for about 50 years.
9 It's a way that we get meals to
10 individuals, to children right where
11 they live. And this year we knew
12 that -- because some families would not
13 feel comfortable sending their children
14 to summer camp, but that kids had been
15 really just virtual learning for months
16 and had been on their own without social
17 interaction for months that we felt that
18 we could use PlayStreets as a vehicle to
19 bring recreation to children where they
20 were. So we decided that we would
21 amplify and enhance our PlayStreets this
22 summer as a way to bring fun to kids on
23 their blocks in addition to the meals.

24 So as many of you know,
25 volunteers apply for their street to

1 become a PlayStreet. And once it's
2 approved, they can close that street
3 between 10:00 and 4:00 every day and we
4 deliver meals. Only this summer we
5 partnered with dozens and dozens of
6 partners to bring play, real play to
7 these streets. Every street received a
8 variety of kits, sports kits, art kits,
9 reading kits, play packs to engage the
10 children so that the PlayStreets
11 supervisors and volunteers had a way to
12 engage with children in a really fun
13 way.

14 We also provided cooling kits
15 to 150 streets. Now, remember our pools
16 were closed so we knew that people would
17 be looking for ways to keep cool. So we
18 had these giant blue bins that we filled
19 with paddy umbrellas, pop-up tents,
20 water balloons, personalized misting and
21 supersoakers for every kid. Then we
22 also worked with the Fire Department and
23 the Water Department to have the fire
24 hydrants open safely on those blocks.

25 On 50 streets that we

1 identified as Super-PlayStreets, we used
2 a racial equity lens and an equity lens
3 to look at what streets had the highest
4 rate of poverty and violence. And we
5 identified those streets to be super
6 streets which means not only did they
7 get those kits that we were talking
8 about, they also received daily programs
9 with partners like the Special Olympics,
10 Mural Arts, Play Studio, the Jr.
11 Barbershop Academy. And then on
12 Fridays, these blocks had dance parties
13 with local DJs and local vendors.
14 Again, just a fun way to keep kids
15 engaged this summer. Everything was
16 free.

17 And then we worked with a local
18 firm and also a firm in Los Angeles to
19 build these wobblers, which were these
20 interlocking play structures that could
21 be moved from street to street. And the
22 wobblers were just a really fun way to
23 get kids active and to get them really
24 cool right outside their door. And we
25 also delivered seesaws to the street and

1 other types of playful learning physical
2 structures. And we moved them from
3 street to street with a big truck. And
4 we raised all the funding for
5 PlayStreets privately over the course of
6 about five weeks this time last year and
7 these were all of the partners that
8 helped be able to do that.

9 And then once summer was over,
10 we moved right into the fall. And that
11 meant once we knew that children would
12 be home learning and some children could
13 not stay at home safely, we knew that we
14 had to provide space for them to learn
15 in recreation centers. And that was a
16 massive lift for us and our staff and I
17 give such tremendous credit to our staff
18 and all of the Out-of-School Time
19 providers that are partnering with us on
20 this and the Office of Children and
21 Families who have been leading this
22 initiative.

23 So we opened 40 virtual
24 learning centers, access centers and
25 recreation centers. We are not just

1 providing the safe space for learning,
2 but we're providing fun activities,
3 meals and snacks for those thousands of
4 children every single day.

5 We also did something really
6 great last summer, which were drive-in
7 movies. There were a lot of groups
8 doing drive-in movies at the Navy Yard,
9 but they were expensive. And so, we
10 decided because we have a screen, we
11 could do it for free. And so, we
12 partnered with T-Mobile and Netflix and
13 the Mann and we had 25 free movie nights
14 in that parking lot last summer. It was
15 a lot of fun and a great way for
16 families again to do something safe,
17 outdoors amidst the pandemic.

18 We also introduced the very
19 first ever E-sports program. We believe
20 it's the first E-sports nationally in
21 the Parks and Recreation Department. We
22 partnered with the local firm Nerd
23 Street Gamers to kick off the first
24 tournament for E-sports at our
25 recreation sites. And it was really

1 successful, a great way to get teenagers
2 especially involved. This was a free
3 way for kids to engage in a tournament,
4 win prizes that were given to us by the
5 Sixers Youth Foundation and hope to
6 really expand on this E-sports
7 partnership in more of our centers
8 moving forward.

9 In January as things began to
10 open up a little bit after the fall
11 surge in COVID cases, we opened up 35 of
12 our gyms for permanent programs and also
13 to support the School District's winter
14 sports initiative. And then in
15 February, we opened up all five of our
16 ice rinks and we maximized public skates
17 and we saw a huge interest in our public
18 skates and our programs at the ice
19 rinks, again because families and people
20 were looking for things to do.

21 And then in March, finally we
22 were able to open our five older adult
23 centers. We had been opening them for
24 meals every single day but this allowed
25 us to reopen them for programming

1 safely. And then just this Monday, we
2 resumed public programs at 117 of our
3 rec centers which are now open from
4 12:00 to 8:00 every single day, and our
5 fields, our rec centers and picnic areas
6 have been and continue to be open for
7 permitting.

8 And then what we're planning
9 for summer, and I know that the Office
10 of Children and Families are planning a
11 much more detailed outline of what's
12 going to happen this summer in the City
13 for children, but just to give an
14 overview of what we're planning for, we
15 are planning for pool opening. So we
16 are actively recruiting lifeguards. We
17 need to hire 400 lifeguards in order to
18 open pools safely this summer. And we
19 are doing screenings because we don't
20 have access to the School District's
21 indoor pool. We are doing screenings at
22 an outdoor pool which we have filled and
23 heated, which is again pretty innovative
24 but out of desperation, and that's where
25 we're doing screenings in an outdoor

1 heated school in Port Richmond so that
2 we can get these lifeguards screened and
3 certified.

4 We are planning to open at
5 least 120 summer camps. We're planning
6 to run over 300 PlayStreets and again
7 planning to open all of our
8 spraygrounds. We're going to have a
9 very heavy focus on teen programming
10 this summer. From not just the
11 employment opportunities, we hope to
12 hire 1,000 teens through the WorkReady
13 program. We're the largest provider of
14 teen jobs in the City, but we also hope
15 to partner with a lot of different
16 organizations to offer teen
17 entrepreneurship programs, conflict
18 resolution and de-escalation programs,
19 structured athletic leagues as well as
20 what we did two summers ago, which was
21 very successful, our cops and rec movie
22 nights at centers.

23 And then again, we'll continue
24 to offer youth and young adult
25 employment opportunities at our pools

1 and our camps and at our PlayStreets.
2 And we say all of this just to say that
3 again I know we sort of beat the drum on
4 this today, but we do believe that Parks
5 and Recreation is absolutely an
6 essential service. We believe that
7 we've demonstrated that second to none
8 over the last 10 months and we want to
9 continue to provide that essential
10 service as a tool for equitable COVID
11 recovery and of course violence
12 prevention. Thank you.

13 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Well, thank
14 very much for the presentation. It
15 wasn't a part of the original request
16 from the resolution, but I do think it
17 was very important information. It was
18 a very thorough presentation. We
19 weren't expecting that level of detail
20 but I do appreciate it and I thank you,
21 because I think that it gave us a lot of
22 information that we didn't have before
23 in terms of what was going to be
24 happening. And I'd love to if you could
25 send that document over as a PDF so that

1 we can circulate it to other members of
2 Council.

3 COMMISSIONER OTT LOVELL: Yeah,
4 I believe Sabrina already has that.

5 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Say it
6 again?

7 COMMISSIONER OTT LOVELL: I
8 think Sabrina has that.

9 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Okay. Very
10 good. I want to go back to the
11 inclusivity of the playgrounds. And I
12 went through the document that was
13 provided in terms of what neighborhoods
14 had received or what centers had
15 received various services and work to
16 make them more inclusive for those with
17 disabilities.

18 And I can tell you from the 1st
19 District which is Councilman Squilla, it
20 looks like from your chart that you
21 provided there were six sites. The 2nd
22 District, Councilman Johnson, there were
23 seven. The 3rd District which is
24 Councilwoman Gauthier, there was one.
25 And the 4th District which is Councilman

1 Jones, there were six. And the 5th
2 District which is Council President
3 Clarke, there were seven. And the 6th
4 District which is Councilman Bobby
5 Henon, there were nine. And the 7th
6 District which is Councilwoman Sanchez,
7 there were nine. And the 8th District
8 which is my District, there were three.
9 In the 9th District which is
10 Councilwoman Parker, there was one. And
11 in the 10th District which is Councilman
12 O'Neill, there were six sites that
13 received some form of inclusivity to
14 make the centers more welcoming to those
15 with disabilities and intergenerational.

16 And I noticed that when I look
17 at it by region, that Northwest
18 Philadelphia combined receives
19 significantly less than all other parts
20 of the City. And I'm wondering if you
21 could address that.

22 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PALANTINO:
23 Certainly, Councilwoman. These were not
24 based on anything other than capital
25 projects that had been performed in

1 those areas. So since 2016, these are
2 the larger capital improvements that
3 have been funded by various
4 Councilmembers in their districts, and
5 they range from anything from just a
6 safety surface replacement up to a full
7 playground replacement. It's just based
8 on all of the capital projects performed
9 during that time.

10 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: So I just
11 want to push back a little bit because I
12 know I have a number of capital projects
13 that have been waiting in the wings for
14 quite some time, and I don't see that
15 reflected here.

16 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PALANTINO:
17 I believe the ones that you have --
18 yeah, we've had -- Pleasant Playground
19 was done prior to that or just around
20 then. Stenton Park was recently
21 completed which contained all of the
22 features mentioned here. I know you
23 have several very large projects that
24 are currently in design that are to go
25 in construction very soon, so that

1 number will likely jump up very
2 drastically.

3 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Okay. I
4 think it will be helpful if you could
5 provide the information, if you can
6 provide it by Council District and
7 also --

8 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PALANTINO:
9 Certainly.

10 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: -- if you
11 could provide what also was pending so
12 that we can have a good sense of what
13 else is in the pipeline.

14 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PALANTINO:
15 Certainly.

16 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Okay. One
17 moment. I'm just multi-tasking here. I
18 had some prepared questions that I
19 wanted to ask. One second.

20 Okay. And I see that we
21 received a response to the number of the
22 questions that we did submit in advance.
23 For the record, I see that you noted 54
24 playgrounds have received some form of
25 renovation. The nature of these

1 improvements is very different. It
2 varies from location to location, I see.
3 And so, there are a number of different
4 questions that were asked by the
5 Committee that you answered. We'll make
6 these answers to the questions available
7 to the Committee.

8 Okay. So I'm going to open it
9 up for questions. If any Member has any
10 questions regarding the inclusion of
11 equipment for seniors for those who have
12 some form of disability, other physical
13 changes that would make it easier for
14 those with a disability. Let's say if I
15 have a child in a wheelchair and a child
16 that is mobile and I want to take both
17 of them to the playground. I want to
18 make sure that there's things for both
19 of my children to be able to do. I'd
20 like to see more of this or that. And
21 so, we look forward to providing
22 information to you in terms of what we
23 are going to be requesting from Parks &
24 Rec.

25 But are there any questions

1 from members of the Committee?

2 (No response.)

3 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Okay. I
4 don't see any. All right. What we'll
5 do now is move to our Panel 2. If Panel
6 1 can just hang around, Aparna and
7 Commissioner, if you can hang around for
8 a moment.

9 Panel 2 is Jesse Jordan or,
10 Madam Clerk, if you can read or call up
11 the next panel.

12 MR. JORDAN: Yes, I'm here,
13 Madam Chair. This is Jesse Jordan.

14 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Mr. Jordan,
15 please state your name for the record
16 and please state your testimony.

17 MR. JORDAN: Sure. My name is
18 Jesse Jordan for the record. Thank you
19 for the opportunity to provide testimony
20 on behalf of ASFCME District Council 47
21 Local 2187 in regards to Resolution
22 210198. I'm here today to advocate for
23 this population and hopefully provide an
24 opportunity to be of assistance to the
25 Parks & Rec in the community and the

1 family that we service by reinstating
2 our bringing to your attention the
3 recreation therapist job class that was
4 once abolished.

5 Since we are increasing
6 accessibility of City-owned or
7 controlled parks and playgrounds, why
8 not further increase their quality of
9 life by reinstating the recreational
10 therapist job class. Recreational
11 therapist will conduct interviews to
12 assess clients' needs, interests and
13 physical capabilities in order to
14 facilitate planning of activities,
15 inhouse recreational activities and
16 field trips based on the access,
17 interests and capabilities of
18 individuals with special emphasis on
19 reality-orienting activities.

20 Each person would have their
21 own established goals, and progress will
22 be continually monitored. They would
23 observe their class participation or
24 therefore plan activities, encourage
25 participation in activities,

1 particularly loners, isolated or
2 depressed persons, attend clients' care
3 plan conferences with staff members
4 representing a variety of departments in
5 order to integrate recreational therapy
6 plans with other aspects of total client
7 care.

8 Recreational therapists would
9 also plan special group activities such
10 as birthday parties, holiday
11 celebrations, plan and arrange outings
12 and shopping sprees, siting tours,
13 various interests. Having a strong
14 social life may reduce health problems,
15 including depression likely resulting in
16 clients living longer.

17 We believe that if we had a
18 recreational therapist as part of Parks
19 & Rec as we once did, that this will
20 bring this population, make them more
21 part of a community, get them more
22 active and have a place they can call
23 their own and address their special
24 needs. Thank you.

25 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Well, thank

1 very much for your testimony. I'd like
2 to have a comment from the Commissioner
3 on this matter.

4 COMMISSIONER OTT LOVELL: Sure.
5 I think it was mentioned in Aparna's
6 testimony that we're currently
7 undergoing a process around a full
8 inclusion plan. So, Chairwoman Bass,
9 the bill that you introduced around
10 inclusive playgrounds was I think really
11 informative in a lot of ways that has
12 really helped to inform our work, not
13 just from a capital perspective but from
14 a programming perspective. It's
15 really -- it's just one step to make
16 sure that physically our sites are
17 inclusive, right.

18 The next step is really to make
19 sure that the programming is inclusive
20 and that our staff are trained to be
21 able to work with any population, with
22 any needs that come to our sites. And
23 historically at Parks & Rec, our
24 response has been that we have Carousel
25 House. But I have learned from a few

1 years now working with the inclusion
2 community and inclusion advocates that
3 that's no longer appropriate. That's
4 not enough.

5 We can't tell people with
6 various needs who live in the Northeast
7 or live in the Northwest that, oh, if
8 you want programs for your population or
9 your needs, you have to go to this place
10 in West Park. That's not appropriate.
11 So what we decided to do was to engage.
12 We did an RFP. We had a great team of
13 consultants. We raised some money. We
14 did an RFP. We had a great team of
15 consultants who responded, led by a
16 group of Carousel Connections and the
17 Special Olympics and then Jefferson
18 University Center for Neurodiversity, so
19 they're leading an inclusion plan for
20 us. They're working with our staff and
21 community stakeholders and we hope in
22 the next month or so to be able to
23 unveil an inclusion plan that gives us
24 the strategy moving forward for what our
25 Department needs to bring inclusion

1 services in terms of programs to
2 everything we do.

3 So what staffing do we need,
4 this recreational therapist position is
5 one tool in that toolbox. What kind of
6 coordination do we need with other
7 agencies and organizations that are
8 experts in this work, what kind of
9 training do our existing staff need.

10 I don't want to say that it's
11 only a recreational therapist or it's
12 only this person that can support
13 people. We can all support people
14 because we can all be trained. We had
15 our first inclusion summit at the kick-
16 off of this plan last year. We actually
17 had it in partnership with the Eagles at
18 Lincoln Financial Field. And it was a
19 tremendous success. It was a training
20 for all of our staff. And so now, that
21 was to really embark on this inclusion
22 plan.

23 And once we have this inclusion
24 plan finalized, we will need the funding
25 to implement that plan, but I think it's

1 really important to have that strategy
2 and have those experts help to inform
3 that, and we certainly think that the
4 recreation therapist position could be
5 one tool in that work.

6 But I thank you for your
7 leadership because I think really, if
8 you will, mandating that physically
9 these changes needed to happen really
10 helped us to think beyond that, right,
11 to think what's next. Now that we know
12 that this investment is being made
13 physically, what can we do
14 programmatically to make sure that we're
15 serving people of every need and every
16 ability in the best way possible.

17 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: That's
18 great. That's great, because it's so
19 important that every one has an
20 opportunity to participate. Let me ask
21 a question piggybacking off of the last
22 question from Mr. Jordan, but slightly
23 different. How has the Department
24 sought the input of people with
25 disabilities before, during and after

1 designing and renovating its parks and
2 recreation and playgrounds?

3 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PALANTINO:
4 I can take that, Councilwoman.

5 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Okay.

6 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PALANTINO:
7 So whenever we embark on a design, we do
8 work very closely with the Council
9 office and community to identify
10 specific patrons of our facilities that
11 may have different needs. In the past
12 year, we've attended about five
13 trainings, our staff, on how to
14 incorporate inclusive design. There
15 isn't a formal code book, if you will.
16 So we've attended just this past year
17 five trainings and many before that
18 working with playground professionals
19 who specialize in inclusive play
20 equipment and site amenities and we take
21 all of that knowledge during the design
22 and incorporate it and then present it
23 to the community.

24 We're certain to work with
25 Council offices to, as I mentioned,

1 identify particular families that may
2 have very specific challenges and some
3 of the photographs presented in response
4 to those questions will show that,
5 whether it's a child that is in a
6 wheelchair, it could be
7 photosensitivity. There's a variety of
8 different needs based on a community, so
9 we're very mindful to ensure that those
10 families are brought to the table. We
11 work through our Advisory Council and
12 again through community meetings to
13 present those designs and get feedback
14 before we actually implement them.

15 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: I would
16 also suggest that you work with some
17 providers of disability services such as
18 Liberty Resources. I think they're
19 great. They do a fantastic job of
20 connecting with the disability community
21 and ensuring that they are at the table
22 on things like this. So I think you
23 should reach out to them and also we can
24 locate some other providers that are out
25 here that are doing so much work to make

1 sure that the disability community in
2 Philadelphia is included every step of
3 the way and that's certainly what our
4 intention is here too. So I would
5 certainly encourage you to do that.

6 Commissioner, did you have a
7 comment on that?

8 COMMISSIONER OTT LOVELL: No.
9 Just Aparna's team, they work incredibly
10 hard. And I remember one incident where
11 we had a woman who reached out about a
12 playground in the Northeast and her
13 daughter had sight impairments. And it
14 was not a capital improvement. It was
15 some just basic things that her daughter
16 needed, and Aparna's staff along with
17 the program staff went out to meet with
18 this family one-on-one to talk about
19 what the little girl needed and how we
20 could help with things like putting tape
21 down to help her see steps of the play
22 equipment. And I got a letter back from
23 the mom that was just so impressed. She
24 reached out to Aparna's team and asked
25 for -- or reached out to the rec leader

1 who reached out to Aparna's team, and
2 then they actually came out to meet with
3 her one-on-one to make those
4 accommodations. And we'll continue to
5 do that. I think it is about just
6 listening and being available. And as I
7 said, making sure that staff understand
8 at that grassroots level that we want to
9 be responsive as possible.

10 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Another
11 quick question: Just going over the
12 list that you provided to us, can you
13 talk about the fact that there's 16
14 parks and playgrounds with inclusive
15 adult fitness areas out of the 54 that
16 receive some form of renovation? Can
17 you tell us why that is, because I would
18 think that's something that you could do
19 in all 54?

20 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PALANTINO:
21 The 16 sites listed have specific adult
22 fitness equipment, not necessarily
23 inclusive equipment for adults. So I
24 would just like to clarify that
25 distinction. So --

1 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Say that
2 again. I'm sorry.

3 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PALANTINO:
4 So the 16 sites that are mentioned in
5 the response are sites with adult
6 fitness equipment, actual structures.
7 It's not necessarily the only types with
8 inclusive adult opportunities. So I
9 just wanted to make the distinction.

10 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: I'm sorry.
11 I don't know what you mean.

12 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PALANTINO:
13 So each of those pieces of equipment of
14 course is inclusive. But there are
15 other amenities at sites for adults with
16 disabilities.

17 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Okay.

18 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PALANTINO:
19 It might be a walking track. It might
20 be other things within that. Game
21 tables with different opportunities --

22 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Okay. So
23 you're saying the 16 sites with adult
24 and fitness areas, that there are some
25 equipment that's specifically designed

1 for adults and then there are other
2 amenities that they can use as well; is
3 that what you mean?

4 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PALANTINO:

5 The other sites have amenities that they
6 can use as well. The 16 have what we
7 call the exercise equipment. And just
8 to maybe provide some clarity, so 16
9 sites have structures that are
10 specifically intended for fitness, adult
11 fitness. The remaining sites have other
12 opportunities as well. So there's more
13 than 16 sites in our system that have
14 opportunity for inclusive adult fitness.

15 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Can we have
16 a list of what those sites are and a
17 breakdown of what those opportunities
18 are?

19 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PALANTINO:
20 Certainly.

21 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: That will
22 be great. And --

23 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PALANTINO:
24 And -- I'm sorry. Those 16 sites were
25 developed in working with different

1 Councilmembers and communities on what
2 type of equipment they would like to
3 have at the facility, because different
4 communities have requested different
5 types of equipment in the past.

6 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Okay. And
7 can you tell me what other renovations
8 have been made in these parks to support
9 adults that may have behavioral
10 disabilities and mental disorders?

11 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PALANTINO:
12 So in terms of site improvements
13 whenever we undertake a capital project,
14 we tried to provide different levels of
15 spaces so there's the very active zones
16 and then there are other passive zones
17 that surround these areas. So we're
18 very mindful to create different zones
19 of access.

20 Where possible we try to create
21 a defined perimeter. We try to create
22 paths that are easy to navigate for
23 folks. It's one of the recommendations
24 for people with different abilities.
25 You don't just put them in a playground.

1 You clearly delineate different zones so
2 they're able to choose what they're
3 comfortable with, so that's the basis of
4 every design that we've undertaken
5 recently.

6 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Very good.
7 And my last question is, Commissioner,
8 can you talk about some of the
9 programming that is surrounding the
10 disability equipment that's coming in?
11 As you mentioned earlier, it's not just
12 enough to have the equipment but to have
13 the programming to go with it. Can you
14 talk about some of the programming you
15 all have developed to make sure that the
16 public is aware of what's out there and
17 what you all are doing?

18 COMMISSIONER OTT LOVELL: Sure.
19 So Aparna can probably speak to this
20 more, but our staff has been trained on
21 the use of the equipment. So when the
22 equipment comes to a site, we want to
23 make sure that our recreation staff know
24 how to use it so that when -- I mean, if
25 you're a mom and you're walking up to a

1 site, it can be a little intimidating to
2 look at that fitness equipment if you
3 don't know how to use it.

4 And so, the idea is to have
5 staff there who have with the
6 manufacturer, with the vendor been
7 trained around what it is and what you
8 can do on it so that when they have
9 families out there at the site, they can
10 explain to them and even hold classes as
11 to here's what you can do with the
12 equipment so that it sort of breaks down
13 that intimidation factor. That's
14 something that we've heard from
15 communities like, oh, it looks good, but
16 I don't really know what to do with it.
17 So --

18 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Right.

19 COMMISSIONER OTT LOVELL: -- we
20 have the signage up which is good, but
21 it still can be intimidating. So that's
22 been really important. Another program
23 that we've done and our staff has led
24 and been really involved with, which is
25 very low cost and low maintenance, it's

1 called the We Walk program. Have you
2 heard of this?

3 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: No. Please
4 tell --

5 COMMISSIONER OTT LOVELL: And
6 it's beloved by these communities. It's
7 sort of taken on a life of its own.
8 It's very simple. We've done it in
9 partnership with the Conservancy for the
10 past maybe three or four years. It's
11 just a walking group. It's led
12 initially by our staff, right, and then
13 we coordinate with volunteers in the
14 community. And there's just a set time
15 and a set route around the perimeter of
16 the site where the group walks. And
17 they get t-shirts and it says We Walk.

18 And there's a group, they meet
19 at passive parks, so it's a lot of our
20 parks that don't have staff. So our
21 stewardship staff goes out and leads the
22 We Walks. And then Cobbs Creek, Clark
23 Park, FDR Park, but then at our
24 recreation centers it's picked up a lot
25 of traction too. It's just an easy way,

1 especially for older adults and seniors,
2 its a really easy way to get them out
3 doing things that are social and safe,
4 but very low impact.

5 COUNCILWOMAN BASS:

6 Commissioner, I would just advise that
7 as the Chair of Parks & Rec I had no
8 idea. But I would love to know when
9 these are happening so that I can
10 participate with my constituents. So if
11 you can make sure that every member of
12 Council gets a list of when these
13 activities are taking place, I'm sure
14 that members would love to be out and
15 have an opportunity to connect and
16 dialogue with people from the community
17 and walk alongside. So if you can get
18 that information --

19 COMMISSIONER OTT LOVELL: It's
20 a great idea. We can definitely give
21 you that. Yeah, it's a great idea.

22 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Thank you
23 so much.

24 And I'm just going to check the
25 chat again. We have a question from

1 Councilwoman Brooks.

2 COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: Hi. I
3 was wondering on your website is there a
4 listing of all the inclusive recreation,
5 so not just the parks, but the equipment
6 and how to use it so if a family was
7 opting to take their child out and they
8 might just were looking, could they go
9 on, see where equipment is and know how
10 to use it before they get there?

11 COMMISSIONER OTT LOVELL:
12 That's a great suggestion. I don't
13 think that's there yet. Am I right,
14 Aparna?

15 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PALANTINO:
16 That's correct.

17 COMMISSIONER OTT LOVELL: But
18 we can definitely do that.

19 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PALANTINO:
20 We're actually working on diagramming
21 that with our GIS folks and populating
22 the information, because there's a
23 certain list of amenities that families,
24 especially with children with special
25 needs or even adults with special needs

1 look for when going to a site, things
2 like parking, bathrooms, availability of
3 water and then the equipment and the
4 facilities themselves. So we're working
5 on diagramming that on a plan that we
6 can put up on our website, but we have
7 to do a thorough assessment to ensure
8 that we're able to provide all of those
9 other amenities as well. So we are
10 actually in the process of doing that.

11 COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: And
12 earlier I don't know who spoke on this,
13 but someone spoke on the need of having
14 a recreation therapist available. This
15 would be a perfect job for a rec
16 therapist intern or a rec therapist to
17 do.

18 I have to speak up for rec
19 therapist because you guys know that I
20 am a rec therapist. So yeah, I think it
21 would be good if it's something that
22 folks could look up and be prepared to
23 use as needed. And diagram it out, this
24 is primarily for seniors, this is folks
25 who have mobility issues. This is for

1 the visually-impaired. I think it would
2 draw more folks to our parks and also a
3 good way to include that community even
4 more into this whole life of Parks &
5 Rec. Thank you.

6 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Thank you,
7 Councilwoman. And I think that was an
8 excellent suggestion that you just made
9 around having a master list, so to
10 speak, of what's out there, what's in
11 the universe here in Philadelphia. If I
12 have family members or children with
13 disabilities and I want to take them out
14 for a recreational experience and a day
15 at the center, where should I go, what
16 should I do.

17 I also want to strongly
18 encourage Parks & Rec to put it on the
19 website but put it in written form as
20 well. I love a booklet or a handout in
21 writing that I could display in my
22 office, my District office especially as
23 people come in, that they could pick it
24 up and browse in it and be aware and
25 know.

1 Everybody's not going to go to
2 the website. Everybody doesn't have web
3 access. In a lot of my District, they
4 don't. But we want to make sure that
5 they get this information into their
6 hands. And it's another handout that we
7 could provide to them in terms of
8 services that are available to the City
9 of Philadelphia. Excellent question,
10 Councilwoman Brooks.

11 I don't see any additional
12 questions. Is there anyone else here
13 that would like to testify?

14 (No response.)

15 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Okay.
16 Seeing none, this concludes the hearing
17 on Resolution Nos. 210198 and 210199. I
18 want to thank everyone for attending
19 today. And everyone, have a great day.
20 Thank you so much for your time and
21 input. Thank you.

22 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PALANTINO:
23 Thank you.

24 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Thank you.

25 COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: Thank

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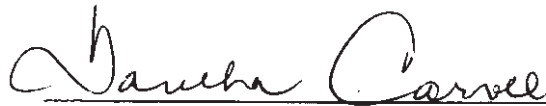
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1 you, everyone. Have a good day.

2 (Committee on Parks, Recreation
3 and Cultural Affairs concluded at
4 11:40 a.m.)

C E R T I F I C A T I O N

I, hereby certify that
the proceedings and evidence noted are
contained fully and accurately in the
stenographic notes taken by me in the
foregoing matter, and that this is a
correct transcript of the same.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Doretha Corvell", is written over a horizontal line.

Court Reporter - Notary Public

(The foregoing certification of
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