

COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA
COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC PROPERTY AND
PUBLIC WORKS

Room 400, City Hall
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Monday, October 28, 2013
10:35 a.m.

PRESENT:

COUNCILMAN BOBBY HENON, CHAIR
COUNCILWOMAN JANNIE BLACKWELL
COUNCILMAN BILL GREEN
COUNCILMAN WILLIAM K. GREENLEE
COUNCILMAN CURTIS JONES, JR.
COUNCILMAN JAMES KENNEY
COUNCILMAN DAVID OH
COUNCILWOMAN MARIA D. QUINONES-SANCHEZ
COUNCILWOMAN BLONDELL REYNOLDS BROWN
COUNCILMAN MARK SQUILLA

BILL 130156 - An ordinance repealing Chapter 16-500 of The Philadelphia Code, entitled "Councilmanic District Development Program," and replacing it with a new Chapter 16-500, entitled "Philadelphia Land Bank," that authorizes the creation of a land bank and provides for its appointment, powers, and duties...

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COUNCILMAN HENON: Good

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morning, ladies and gentlemen. Can we

4

all take our seats, please.

5

Again, good morning. The

6

Committee of Public Property and Public

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Works is now in session.

8

Would the Clerk please read the

9

title of the bill.

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THE CLERK: Bill No. 130156, an

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ordinance repealing Chapter 16-500 of The

12

Philadelphia Code, entitled "Councilmanic

13

District Development Program," and

14

replacing it with a new Chapter 16-500,

15

entitled "Philadelphia Land Bank," that

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authorizes the creation of a land bank

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and provides for its appointment, powers,

18

and duties, all under certain terms and

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conditions.

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COUNCILMAN HENON: Thank you.

21

First, I'd like to recognize

22

that a quorum is present. To my left, I

23

have Councilwoman Jannie Blackwell,

24

Councilman Green, Vice Chair Councilman

25

Greenlee. To my right, Councilman Jim

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2 Kenney and Councilman Oh.

3 Before we get started, I want
4 to say a few words. As you can see, we
5 have a lot of folks here, and the witness
6 list providing testimony today is
7 extensive. The panels are kind of full,
8 and there's many of you here. So I'm
9 going to ask that those who come up in
10 panels to testify, keep their testimony
11 to three minutes. We will be timing it
12 for the sake of time and repetitiveness.

13 When it comes to redundancy in
14 support or opposition of the bill, if you
15 would please -- I am going to keep
16 reminding as the panels come up, if you
17 have the same thing as the previous
18 speaker, after some time I'm going to ask
19 that if you don't have anything
20 different, if you have some support that
21 isn't different from the previous
22 speaker, please, by all means, make your
23 voice heard. If not, please, as you come
24 up as a panel, state your name, the
25 community group you represent or the

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2 group that you belong to and state your
3 position in favor of or in opposition of
4 this bill here today.

5 So I am unfortunately going to
6 have to be a little stringent about these
7 rules that we're going to be setting down
8 for today.

9 So with that, I am going to
10 recognize Councilwoman Maria
11 Quinones-Sanchez.

12 COUNCILWOMAN SANCHEZ: Thank
13 you, Mr. Chair. I will be brief, because
14 I think the speakers will be more
15 eloquent than I in terms about what we
16 are attempting to do today.

17 For many years, we've been
18 working on creating the tools that the
19 City needs to properly collect and
20 dispose of delinquent properties that
21 create blight throughout the City. I
22 want to thank the Nutter Administration
23 and his team who were part of a work
24 group with you, Mr. Chair, Councilwoman
25 Jannie Blackwell, the President's Office,

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2 and myself, as we work -- we talked
3 through how do we operationalize that.
4 There's still a lot of unanswered
5 questions as it relates to that, but
6 here's where we are.

7 We are having a hearing today,
8 and you'll hear from many, many groups
9 from very diverse areas who have been
10 working on this issue for many years. We
11 have a historic coalition of private,
12 public sector, grassroots, community
13 organizations, unions, and others who
14 understand that Philadelphia has an
15 opportunity today to be on the forefront
16 of a reform process that will help us
17 ultimately grow this city.

18 I know that, Mr. Chair, you
19 have been interested and have worked hard
20 as it relates to our tax collection
21 process. Our new Council colleagues have
22 worked on this issue extensively. And so
23 here we have an opportunity with this new
24 tool given to us by the State Legislature
25 led by Representative John Taylor, we

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2 have another tool in the toolbox. And so
3 the issue that we will be talking today
4 is, how do we establish a mechanism to
5 accept this toolbox and how do we
6 continue to work with this historic
7 coalition of folks who have come
8 together, who all agree on one thing: We
9 need to do a better job with our blighted
10 and delinquent tax properties.

11 I personally want to thank all
12 of the members who have worked on this,
13 the Campaign to Take Back Vacant Land,
14 the Building Industry, Liberty
15 Resources -- there's just an incredible
16 wealth of talent and stakeholders -- the
17 Pennsylvania Coalition of CDCs, and
18 others who have educated us, who have
19 talked with us, who have debated us, and
20 who have challenged us to do a better job
21 at leveraging the resources that we have
22 and, in this case, our blighted
23 resources, who can be assets for us to
24 create affordability and accessibility
25 throughout the City.

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2 So I look forward to this. As
3 I said before, this is a work in
4 progress. You, Mr. Chair, as Chair of
5 the Public Property Committee on Council,
6 we will count on your strong leadership
7 through this as we operationalize this
8 and make this a reality, and that -- the
9 reason why those discussions need to
10 continue even after today is, ultimately
11 it is about resources, and we have to be
12 committed, both the Administration and
13 Council, to make sure that we
14 appropriately resource this tool so that
15 it could be as effective as it
16 potentially can be.

17 So thank you to the Committee
18 on Public Property and thank you to all
19 the advocates for their work in getting
20 us here today.

21 COUNCILMAN HENON: Thank you,
22 Councilwoman.

23 Well, we're going to get
24 started. Here we go. Is there anyone
25 here from the Administration that wishes

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2 to testify today on Bill No. 130156?

3 (Witnesses approached witness
4 table.)

5 COUNCILMAN HENON: Could you
6 please state your name for the record and
7 start your testimony.

8 MR. KOONCE: Good morning,
9 Councilman Henon, members of the Public
10 Property and Public Works Committee and
11 members of City Council. I'm Michael
12 Koonce, Executive Vice President of the
13 Philadelphia Housing Development Corp,
14 and I'm here to present testimony on
15 behalf of the Administration on Bill No.
16 130156, which would create a Land Bank
17 for the City of Philadelphia. I am
18 joined by Brian Abernathy and John
19 Carpenter of the Redevelopment Authority.

20 The Nutter Administration
21 supports the creation of a Land Bank.
22 The Land Bank is a strategic acquisition
23 and disposition tool and will be the next
24 step in the City's efforts to address the
25 problem of vacant and blighted properties

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2 and to return these properties to
3 productive reuse.

4 Over the past two years, we've
5 taken steps to streamline the cumbersome,
6 confusing processes that have surrounded
7 the disposition of publicly owned vacant
8 land and deterred development in
9 Philadelphia. We also knew that this
10 work would smooth the transition to a
11 Land Bank.

12 Those steps include the
13 development of comprehensive policies for
14 land disposition; a citywide data system
15 designed to track inventory and business
16 practices around inventory; creation of a
17 website that lists available publicly
18 owned land, describes parcel shape and
19 size as well as zoning designations, and
20 allows interested buyers to submit
21 expressions of interest electronically;
22 up-front pricing for most available
23 parcels; and a comprehensive sales
24 process for more desirable properties.

25 The past summer we also began

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2 working with the Department of Records
3 and the Streets Department's Survey
4 District to identify and clear up City
5 liens and longstanding title ambiguities
6 associated with individual parcels so
7 that they can be more quickly conveyed to
8 a buyer.

9 We believe a Land Bank will
10 have many benefits. A Land Bank will be
11 able to acquire properties using the tax
12 sale process and more quickly assemble
13 these properties with those already in
14 public ownership. By bidding only the
15 amount of the City's claims for
16 delinquent taxes and unpaid liens, the
17 Land Bank will have the power under state
18 law to obtain a property ahead of any
19 other buyer at a tax sale. This will
20 facilitate the efficient acquisition of
21 properties and overcome the superior
22 bidding power of speculators. It will
23 allow the City to more efficiently and
24 inexpensively complete assemblages of
25 property and create larger and more

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2 attractive parcels for both public
3 purposes and private development.

4 The Land Bank will improve the
5 development process. Public agencies
6 frequently own several properties on a
7 single block that are close to but not
8 adjacent to each other. These properties
9 are separated by privately held, often
10 tax-delinquent, properties. In the past,
11 the City has used eminent domain to
12 acquire these intervening properties.
13 But the eminent domain process is
14 complicated, time-consuming and, by and
15 large, too expensive to use, especially
16 considering that NTI funds are nearly
17 expended and federal resources have
18 decreased.

19 The Land Bank's new tax sale
20 power will allow the City to acquire
21 these intermingled properties for just
22 the cost of bringing the property to the
23 tax sale. With a less expensive process,
24 the City will be able to assemble more of
25 its fragmented inventory into

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2 usable-sized parcels, making the current
3 inventory more useful and valuable to
4 everyone.

5 A Land Bank containing all the
6 City's surplus properties would also
7 improve the maintenance of the property
8 within that inventory, as it is less
9 expensive and more efficient for one
10 entity to maintain the property than for
11 four agencies to do so. This means
12 existing maintenance resources will be
13 better leveraged. That said, additional
14 resources will be required if the parcels
15 are to be maintained in the fashion we'd
16 all like to see them maintained, and if a
17 Land Bank is created by City Council, we
18 will request additional funding resources
19 during the FY15 budget process.

20 From the customer perspective,
21 whether it's a homeowner seeking a side
22 yard, a developer seeking to assemble a
23 development site or a Councilmember
24 inquiring about a property, the one point
25 of contact a Land Bank will offer -- the

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2 one point of contact, a Land Bank, will
3 offer much simpler inquiry and
4 disposition process.

5 We support creation of a Land
6 Bank, but we do have some concerns.
7 While the City must maintain a strategic
8 plan for the acquisition and disposition
9 of property, we are concerned that a
10 highly mandated specific strategic
11 planning process such as the one laid out
12 in the bill as introduced would be
13 onerous, inefficient, and costly.
14 Instead, we would favor a more flexible
15 process that may be subject to Council's
16 approval.

17 We also prefer the simplest,
18 most direct means of Council oversight of
19 conveyances by the Land Bank, and that
20 would be by means of a Council resolution
21 and only a Council resolution.

22 Finally, we believe that
23 pricing policies must be flexible to
24 enable the Land Bank to react nimbly to
25 individual circumstances. The current

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2 language of the bill may constrain the
3 decision-making process. With both
4 policies and individual conveyances
5 subject to Council approval, we see no
6 need for the bill to be highly
7 prescriptive in an area where flexibility
8 and responsiveness are key.

9 We are eager to work with the
10 sponsor and the Committee to arrive at a
11 Land Bank that both reflects appropriate
12 land use goals and improves the current
13 system.

14 Thank you for the opportunity
15 to present this testimony. My colleagues
16 and I will be happy to answer any
17 questions that you or other members of
18 Council may have.

19 COUNCILMAN HENON: Is there
20 anyone else with the Administration that
21 wishes to testify?

22 MR. ABERNATHY: No. We're here
23 to answer questions.

24 COUNCILMAN HENON: Okay.
25 Before we proceed and I ask any questions

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2 from this panel, I'd like to recognize
3 our Majority Leader, Councilman Jones,
4 has joined us.

5 So I have a few questions to
6 the panel, and you can decide which one
7 is in the position to answer.

8 In your testimony, Mr. Koonce,
9 you had talked about the transition to
10 the Land Bank to your agency. Can
11 somebody explain to me how that
12 transaction or that transition is going
13 to take place and what happens to the
14 employees and their benefits and pensions
15 along the way during that transition?

16 MR. KOONCE: It would be our
17 hope that in the next year, we would work
18 with the bargaining unit for those
19 employees effective at the three agencies
20 to effect a transition agreement. What
21 would happen, it would be our hope that
22 we would be able to assign employees from
23 the three agencies, from City Planning --
24 I mean from OHCD, from PRA, and from
25 PHDC, to the Philadelphia Land Bank and

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2 not affect their retirement benefits or
3 their salaries.

4 COUNCILMAN HENON: When do you
5 foresee these conversations and the plan
6 for a transition taking place?

7 MR. KOONCE: We've already
8 started. Brian and I have already had
9 very preliminary conversations with the
10 bargaining unit, and we would hope that
11 we could actually jump-start them, get
12 them going a lot quicker than maybe some
13 anticipate. So we're really eager to
14 start the dialogue with the bargaining
15 unit about the transition agreement,
16 because we believe that's the only way
17 that this works.

18 COUNCILMAN HENON: So the
19 staffing of the Land Bank would be coming
20 from multiple agencies for similar job
21 responsibilities that they currently are
22 performing at this time --

23 MR. KOONCE: Yes.

24 COUNCILMAN HENON: --
25 transitioning over to the Land Bank; is

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2 that correct?

3 MR. KOONCE: That's correct.

4 And I guess the key thing for the
5 bargaining units would be that we don't
6 foresee any layoffs as a result of this
7 process.

8 COUNCILMAN HENON: So no
9 layoffs, pensions are secure, and their
10 collective bargaining rights will be
11 honored?

12 MR. KOONCE: That's assuming
13 that we can work out a transition
14 agreement with the bargaining unit.

15 COUNCILMAN HENON:
16 Mr. Abernathy, do you have anything else
17 to add to that?

18 MR. ABERNATHY: No, sir.

19 COUNCILMAN HENON: Anyone from
20 the panel wish to speak?

21 The Chair recognizes
22 Councilwoman Blackwell.

23 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
24 you, Mr. Chairman.

25 Good evening -- good morning.

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2 Days are so long, I got to figure out
3 night from day. But at any rate, thank
4 you all for coming, and certainly we
5 believe in what you say and what your
6 efforts are. We've been talking since
7 the day this legislation was introduced
8 about what happens to the employees, and
9 it is my suggestion and I'm requesting of
10 the Chair and this Committee that we hear
11 all of our testimony, but that we pass
12 legislation when we know the workers are
13 protected.

14 I trust all of you in what you
15 say, but certainly there's a step above
16 us, and we need to ensure, having been
17 here many times before, we need to ensure
18 that workers are protected. We don't
19 need to hear somebody saying, I worked at
20 an agency 25 years, I got one more year
21 before I retire, then they're transferred
22 to a new entity and they have to start
23 all over again, maybe at a different
24 salary and different pension and all of
25 the things that matter when it comes to

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2 employee issues.

3 And so I am requesting of this
4 Committee that we hear all the testimony.
5 This is a very important issue, but that
6 we not pass any Land Bank legislation
7 until we have in writing that all the
8 workers are protected and that their
9 pension, salaries, and benefits won't be
10 decreased. That is my request, and I
11 hope the Committee will consider it and
12 agree with me.

13 COUNCILMAN HENON: Thank you,
14 Councilwoman.

15 The Chair recognizes Councilman
16 Oh.

17 COUNCILMAN OH: Thank you very
18 much, Chairman.

19 Did the Administration do an
20 econometric study of some sort that would
21 indicate that by passing this legislation
22 that the City, in putting this non-used
23 land back into commercial, industrial,
24 and private and public circulation, that
25 there would be more income for the City?

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2 MR. KOONCE: John, could you
3 answer that.

4 MR. CARPENTER: Good morning.
5 My name is John Carpenter.

6 In 2010, the Redevelopment
7 Authority commissioned a study in
8 collaboration with the Philadelphia
9 Association of CDCs that tried to take a
10 first-cut look at that, and that study,
11 while it wasn't perfect and it wasn't
12 intended to be sort of the definitive
13 answer to your question, estimated there
14 were significant benefits to the City,
15 both from a jobs and tax base
16 perspective, and over time reduction in
17 costs to the City for caring for land as
18 a result of doing a better job of
19 bringing land back into productive use.

20 COUNCILMAN OH: Could you share
21 that study with our Chairman for
22 distribution to this panel?

23 MR. CARPENTER: We'd be happy
24 to.

25 COUNCILMAN OH: So my next

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2 question then is, the money that you've
3 identified that will be needed to support
4 this entity should this legislation move
5 forward, how much money is that, and
6 compare that to how much money will be
7 created so that I could see that the
8 overall tax burden on the citizens of
9 Philadelphia will be reduced.

10 MR. CARPENTER: I don't think
11 we can completely answer the question
12 you're asking today. However, I can give
13 you a sense of what we think this program
14 will cost to get off the ground.

15 We think initially it's going
16 to cost us around a million and a half
17 dollars to do startup on the operation.
18 The current operations cost us a little
19 under \$4 million a year. We're going to
20 consolidate that all into one place, and
21 we anticipate that the first year, sort
22 of doing a better job around maintenance,
23 costs us an additional million and a half
24 dollars on the maintenance side.

25 It's a little difficult to

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2 predict how in that same year that would
3 affect our revenue. I don't think we
4 have estimates for that at the moment.

5 COUNCILMAN OH: Will you be
6 getting estimates in the near future?

7 MR. ABERNATHY: Councilman, at
8 least the way we understand the question,
9 you're asking really about tax revenue
10 over time, and unfortunately that's a
11 difficult projection for us to come up
12 with. We do have rough estimates for the
13 first few years about what the revenue
14 generated from sales will be, but what
15 that revenue generates as far as the
16 sales, additional jobs, additional
17 economics is difficult for us to say
18 right now.

19 COUNCILMAN OH: Okay. I do
20 believe this is a great program. I
21 believe it will put a lot of land back
22 into use. I believe there will be a
23 better outlook for Philadelphia, more tax
24 revenues and other things, but that's my
25 belief without any kind of data. And

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2 whatever data you have, would you share
3 that with us so we could look at it
4 objectively for our consideration?

5 MR. ABERNATHY: Yes, sir.

6 COUNCILMAN OH: Thank you very
7 much.

8 COUNCILMAN HENON: The Chair
9 recognizes Councilman Kenney.

10 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: Thank you,
11 Mr. Chairman.

12 Mr. Koonce, in your testimony,
13 you indicated the Administration's
14 favorability of creating a Land Bank. Is
15 the Administration in favor of Bill No.
16 130156 with the amendments that are being
17 offered today? Are you stating publicly
18 the Administration's support of this
19 particular piece of legislation?

20 MR. KOONCE: I'm sorry. I
21 haven't seen the amendments that are
22 being offered today.

23 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: If you get
24 a chance to take a look at them -- I
25 don't know if you have them or not.

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2 MR. ABERNATHY: No.

3 COUNCILMAN KENNEY:

4 Conceptually I understand your support,
5 but this particular bill and whatever is
6 being proposed in amendments I think you
7 need to look at and then give us your
8 opinion.

9 Mr. Chairman, they don't have
10 the amendments.

11 COUNCILMAN HENON: We can
12 provide them for you right now.

13 MR. ABERNATHY: Thank you.

14 MR. KOONCE: Thank you.

15 COUNCILMAN HENON: We'd
16 appreciate you reviewing them and at a
17 certain point would recognize your
18 position.

19 MR. KOONCE: Yes.

20 MR. ABERNATHY: Yes, we can do
21 that.

22 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: My point,
23 Mr. Chairman, is, you're here testifying
24 in favor of this bill and this is the
25 purpose of the hearing, because the bill

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2 is on the agenda. If you don't know what
3 the bill says, how can you be in favor of
4 it? That may not be your fault.

5 Probably isn't. But I just need you to
6 look at these proposed amendments and
7 comment. Whether we agree with your
8 position after that or not, whether you
9 agree with us after that or not remains
10 to be seen, but you really can't compare
11 apples and oranges and come up with
12 something rational.

13 MR. KOONCE: We'll take a look.

14 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: Thank you.

15 COUNCILMAN HENON:

16 Councilwoman.

17 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
18 you. And then I know Councilman Green
19 wants to speak. But those are my
20 sentiments exactly. Many of us have a
21 lot of interest in this area, but
22 certainly Mr. Koonce hasn't seen
23 information. We haven't seen
24 information. It's just too important to
25 not review it all very, very, very

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2 carefully.

3 I'd like to be sure when it
4 comes to the rights of people and their
5 work rights and also when it comes to
6 property and development in the City of
7 Philadelphia, but that we've had ample
8 time to review it. And obviously we
9 haven't because we're just getting it
10 this morning as well.

11 So we haven't seen anything,
12 and I'm not comfortable and I'm not
13 prepared because I haven't had a chance
14 to mull over things myself.

15 So I feel much like Mr. Koonce.
16 You can't criticize, but you really can't
17 say you've seen it, because information
18 has not been shared. And that's another
19 reason that we ask that we hear all the
20 testimony, but that certainly we hold up
21 until we have review time so that we're
22 comfortable when we move forward.

23 Thank you.

24 COUNCILMAN HENON: The Chair
25 recognizes Councilman Green.

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2 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Thank you,
3 Mr. Chairman.

4 Just a couple of quick things.
5 I guess the first is, in your testimony
6 you say that you think that the Land Bank
7 bill is too prescriptive in terms of
8 process. And I just sort of read through
9 the process that's in here, and it
10 doesn't seem all that limiting at all,
11 and I just wondered if you could point to
12 any specific areas where you have
13 objections or is this just the general
14 administrative objection to Council
15 saying anything about how a department is
16 run?

17 MR. ABERNATHY: Brian
18 Abernathy, Executive Director of the
19 Redevelopment Authority.

20 To your point, Councilman, this
21 is not a direct -- we're concerned about
22 Council dictating to the Administration.
23 There are certain prescriptions in the
24 original legislation. There have been
25 conversations with the Councilwoman's

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2 office about softening that language, and
3 I think we made some significant progress
4 towards an agreement that we all could
5 live with. But, specifically, the
6 language on pricing we feel is a policy
7 matter, not a legislative matter.

8 Pricing is something that changes quickly
9 over time, and having as many flexible
10 tools as possible working with Council to
11 use those tools is one that we support.

12 And, again, on the strategic
13 planning issue, while we certainly
14 understand the intent of the Councilwoman
15 on making sure that we have plans for
16 disposition and for affordable housing, I
17 think there's two things. One, we're
18 worried about our capacity to follow
19 through on the strategic planning that is
20 written, and also wonder if the Land Bank
21 is the best tool for that planning.

22 Again, the Land Bank is a tool for
23 acquisition and disposition, not
24 necessarily a planning agency like the
25 Planning Commission or the Office of

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2 Housing and Community Development.

3 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Sure.

4 Nothing would prevent you, though, from
5 asking the Planning Commission to help
6 you develop a strategic plan; is that
7 correct?

8 MR. ABERNATHY: Agreed.

9 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Don't you
10 think that the major thing that the City
11 has been lacking with respect to a whole
12 bunch of things -- we could have the
13 Commerce Director here and talk about the
14 fact that every time they testify at
15 budget hearings, I ask them for their
16 plan to attract businesses, and they
17 still don't have one. The lack of a plan
18 at all with respect to land disposition,
19 a strategic plan that's written that the
20 Administration can be held accountable
21 to, is one of the major things that's
22 lacking today, and so asking for one,
23 whether it's a technology strategic plan,
24 a land disposition strategic plan, is
25 something we hope will create an actual

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2 plan, plus accountability to goals and
3 standards. And so --

4 MR. ABERNATHY: Yes, sir.

5 COUNCILMAN GREEN: -- I just
6 want to share my view on that.

7 MR. ABERNATHY: And that's
8 appreciated, and to be clear, we weren't
9 objecting to the strategic plan per say.
10 We were objecting to some of the language
11 that was contained in the bill. We have
12 no concerns about being held accountable,
13 coming up with clear goals and making
14 sure that those goals and accountability
15 comes before this body. Actually, we're
16 very supportive of that. Some of the
17 language within the strategic plan
18 section we had concerns over, and I think
19 we made some significant progress last
20 week in addressing those concerns.

21 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Okay. Could
22 I ask somebody from Council staff to
23 please provide the final copy of the
24 amendments to the people here so they can
25 take a look while we're...

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2 The other thing I want to say
3 is, I don't know how long you two
4 gentlemen on either side of Brian,
5 Mr. Koonce and -- I'm sorry.

6 MR. CARPENTER: John Carpenter.

7 COUNCILMAN GREEN: --

8 Mr. Carpenter have been involved in PHDC
9 or other things or if you were here
10 during the Street Administration. So
11 this seems to me, the consolidation,
12 putting everything in one place with
13 special powers, very similar to an effort
14 that was undertaken during the Street
15 Administration to put everything under
16 the RDA. A report was done. That
17 couldn't get done.

18 What is the difference between
19 this effort and that effort other than
20 the obvious, which is the ability of the
21 Land Bank to use tax liens and to take
22 properties from Sheriff Sale and just
23 putting them directly in?

24 MR. KOONCE: Well, I was
25 actually here. I was at the Office of

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2 Housing and Community Development in '92,
3 and so I was actually on board for the
4 transition of the housing -- or the reorg
5 of '93 in the Rendell Administration and
6 for the limited reorg during the Street
7 Administration.

8 I think one of the things that
9 leads me to believe that we can actually
10 get this done and do a good job
11 thereafter is, in part, due to the
12 leadership both in the Administration and
13 the leadership at the individual
14 agencies. Over the last year since I've
15 been back at PHDC, we've actually made a
16 concerted effort to actually consolidate
17 things where we've seen opportunities.
18 We all realize that the days when there
19 may be three, four, five different
20 agencies probably won't -- those days
21 won't last forever, and we've already
22 made plans. I know Brian and I are --
23 for example, his agency and my agency are
24 making plans now to consolidate things
25 like floor space and equipment and things

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2 like that, and that's something that
3 never had been done since I've been in
4 the Administration.

5 MR. ABERNATHY: And just to
6 build on top of that, Councilman, I think
7 the key effort here is our partnership
8 with the bargaining unit as well. We
9 recognize that if we can't work through
10 the concerns of our employees with the
11 bargaining unit, then this effort will
12 have some serious challenges, to put it
13 mildly. I think you have my primary
14 commitment and I think both Mr. Koonce's
15 as well as Ms. McColloch's. We want to
16 protect the pension of our employees, we
17 want to protect their healthcare, and we
18 want to protect their well-being. That
19 is our opening statement into the
20 bargaining unit, and I think we'll be
21 able to come to a solid resolution.

22 COUNCILMAN GREEN: My question
23 really went more to the consolidation
24 under the RDA that didn't happen under
25 the Street Administration as opposed to

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2 what actually did happen, and this seems
3 to me to be a very similar effort, except
4 it's under a Land Bank in terms of one
5 place for disposition.

6 MR. ABERNATHY: Sure. I think
7 there's two primary differences. One of
8 the biggest obstacles, having sat in
9 Council staff during that transition
10 process, was certainly the objections of
11 the bargaining unit, and I think
12 Councilwoman Blackwell's leadership on
13 the issue very much played into that, as
14 well as prerogative being certainly an
15 issue, and that's one that we are not
16 tackling here today.

17 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Thank you.

18 COUNCILMAN HENON: The Chair
19 recognizes Councilman Kenney.

20 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: Thank you,
21 Mr. Chairman.

22 What do you believe in this new
23 possible framework of Land Bank is City
24 Council's effective and appropriate
25 responsibilities and actions? What role

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2 do you think that the City Council should
3 play once the Land Bank is established?

4 What is effective and what is
5 appropriate, in the Administration's
6 view, as the Council's involvement?

7 MR. KOONCE: I think that
8 before any land is transferred, I think
9 Brian and I and our staffs need to meet
10 with the individual District Council
11 folks and determine exactly what
12 properties should be transferred to the
13 Land Bank and which might need a heavier
14 touch and may need to stay at places like
15 the Redevelopment Authority or in some
16 cases even Public Property. I think --
17 so we need to work with the District
18 Council folks on land coming into the
19 Land Bank.

20 And I think on policies and
21 procedures on disposition, policies on
22 pricing, things like that, I think we
23 need to bring to Council and get approval
24 of Council some sort of -- I don't like
25 to use the word -- I'm hesitant to use

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2 the word "program statement and budget,"
3 but that's sort of like what it's similar
4 to in the NTI process whereby we would
5 bring you -- each year we would lay out
6 what we anticipate accomplishing and how
7 we anticipate accomplishing it, how much
8 it's going to cost, and the transparent
9 methods we would use to do that, and we
10 would seek the approval of Council.

11 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: So when it
12 comes acquisition and disposition of
13 properties, you think Council should
14 formally approve it?

15 MR. KOONCE: I'm not exactly
16 sure about the acquisition of property.
17 I think for disposition of Council, yes,
18 I do.

19 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: Formally
20 approve it.

21 MR. KOONCE: Formally.

22 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: Thank you,
23 Mr. Chairman.

24 COUNCILMAN HENON: The Chair
25 recognizes Councilman Squilla who has

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2 joined us today. You have questions?

3 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Yeah, one
4 question. Thank you, Chairman.

5 I heard earlier in the
6 testimony that I believe it was \$1.5
7 million to launch. Now, would that just
8 be a one-time fee or is there an ongoing
9 cost yearly?

10 MR. CARPENTER: That 1.5 is
11 sort of a one-time cost, the cost of
12 actually moving the property into the new
13 entity and building the systems within
14 PHDC to better track it.

15 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: So there's
16 no other costs associated --

17 MR. CARPENTER: There's ongoing
18 costs of running it, which are, to some
19 extent, the collection of all the costs
20 we incur today. So I gave you the
21 numbers for the first year. In the
22 second year, we expect we're going to
23 spend somewhat more on maintenance so
24 that we're ramping up our maintenance
25 efforts over time. The operation costs

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2 are probably going to continue at more or
3 less the same level, that \$4 million a
4 year that we talked about, but we're
5 going to start to see those costs begin
6 to be offset by property sales revenues
7 that will reduce sort of the net request
8 for funds over time.

9 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: And then I
10 guess, Mr. Koonce, during your testimony
11 you said that they would favor a more
12 flexible process that may be subject to
13 Council's approval. Is that something
14 that Council would have to approve or --
15 I wasn't sure of that statement.

16 MR. KOONCE: I think as part of
17 our -- the way we look at our strategic
18 plans, we look at them as part of the
19 acquisition/disposition policies of the
20 Land Bank in general. We look at that
21 and pricing, both up-front pricing and
22 appraisal pricing. We look at those as
23 things that we would include in our
24 strategic plan that we'd bring back to
25 Council for approval.

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2 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: So you're
3 saying then to disposition for the
4 properties being put into the Land Bank
5 and the properties after they're being
6 sold, then it would be approved by
7 Council?

8 MR. KOONCE: The properties
9 that would come into the Land Bank, we
10 would need a Council resolution to bring
11 the properties into the Land Bank from
12 City Planning and from the Redevelopment
13 Authority.

14 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: And then
15 to dispose of them the same way?

16 MR. KOONCE: We would look for
17 a Council resolution for each individual
18 conveyance.

19 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: So similar
20 to how it's done now?

21 MR. KOONCE: So now at the
22 Philadelphia Housing Development
23 Corporation, there's about a thousand
24 properties. They don't require a Council
25 resolution. So that would be a change

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2 for those properties. At the
3 Redevelopment Authority, all acquisitions
4 are conveyed via a redeveloper agreement,
5 and those properties are -- that
6 acquisition needs to be approved by the
7 Philadelphia Redevelopment Authority
8 Board and City Council. And for Vacant
9 Property Review Committee, those
10 transactions need to be reviewed both by
11 the Vacant Property Review Committee, by
12 resolution of City Council, and by
13 Redevelopment Authority Board. So it
14 would simplify the process a bit.

15 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: So then at
16 this point, then, the Public Property,
17 Housing Authority property, RDA property
18 would all be in this Land Bank?

19 MR. KOONCE: The properties --
20 as I said before, we would sit down and
21 we would discuss with each District
22 Councilperson which properties it made
23 sense to be in the Land Bank and which
24 properties it might make sense to keep at
25 places like the Redevelopment Authority.

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2 And I guess the key there would be or the
3 decision-maker there would be if you
4 needed additional controls and such over
5 the development project, it might make
6 sense to keep it at the Redevelopment
7 Authority as opposed to bringing it to
8 the Land Bank, but we would look to the
9 District Councilperson for some guidance
10 there.

11 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: All right.
12 And then if there's a property that was
13 put into the Land Bank for some reason
14 and then needed to be part of an
15 assemblage of something that was maybe in
16 the Public Property or, say, PRA, is that
17 something that could be pulled out then
18 and made part of that package or would it
19 have to be two separate sales?

20 MR. KOONCE: It would require a
21 resolution of City Council to pull it
22 out, yes.

23 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Okay.

24 MR. KOONCE: But it could be
25 done simply by a resolution.

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2 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA:

3 Resolution, and then be part of an
4 assemblage of some other parcel.

5 COUNCILMAN HENON: Councilman
6 Kenney.

7 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: Thank you,
8 Mr. Chairman.

9 Your testimony, sir, was that
10 in the second and subsequent years, the
11 cost would be ramped up for maintenance?
12 I thought that was the whole purpose of
13 the Land Bank, was to dispose of the
14 properties so we no longer have to
15 maintain them. If we're going to have --
16 I understand there's going to be some
17 maintenance issues, but to ramp up for
18 maintenance costs to me seems
19 counterintuitive to what we're doing by
20 creating the Land Bank, because we're
21 going to try to get it back into private
22 hands so that people can develop it. So
23 if they would maintain it, we wouldn't
24 have to.

25 MR. CARPENTER: That is our

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2 plan too. However, it's important to
3 understand that the majority of the
4 inventory that's owned by the three
5 agencies today is not well cared for, and
6 what we're suggesting as we turn the Land
7 Bank on is that we begin to do a better
8 job of caring for our own properties, and
9 that will cost money in the first couple
10 years.

11 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: But to me
12 it seems against the philosophy of what
13 it is -- we're trying to get this
14 property that's been badly maintained
15 because of cost constraints into the
16 hands of the private sector so they can
17 develop and maintain them. Why are we
18 continuing to maintain properties that we
19 haven't -- or going to increase
20 maintenance on properties we haven't well
21 maintained to begin with?

22 MR. ABERNATHY: Sure. So I
23 think one of the keys to understand as we
24 turn on the Land Bank, it's not going to
25 be a panacea. We're not going to be able

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2 to move all of our properties. Of the
3 10,000 properties that are currently in
4 our inventory, 90 percent of those aren't
5 particularly wanted by the private
6 market. So there will be some time
7 before the land bank's proceeds catch up
8 to its costs.

9 But to your point, Councilman,
10 that is the final goal of the Land Bank,
11 but the first few years we'll have a cost
12 on the General Fund.

13 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: Isn't the
14 pricing model the issue also? I mean, if
15 we're going to try to maximize the return
16 of the sale of these properties and we're
17 acting as an obstacle to the sale of the
18 property in the private hands for
19 development -- I know we've had that
20 problem in the past prior to your tenure
21 at the RDA where there was a belief
22 amongst leadership there that a property
23 was worth X when it was actually worth X
24 minus, and wind up not getting property
25 developed and not moving property because

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2 of being stubborn about the X.

3 MR. ABERNATHY: Sure. So I
4 believe that our new disposition policies
5 actually address that significantly. It
6 certainly doesn't resolve all the
7 conflicts, but it has gone a long way by
8 allowing for nominal disposition for
9 specific economic development, side
10 yards, community benefits, as well as
11 allowing for a negotiated sale, in some
12 cases based on appraisals of two sides.
13 It's not going to resolve every conflict
14 certainly, and I think it's within our --
15 it has to be the agency's role to take a
16 hard stance at times to protect the
17 taxpayers' interest, but there is -- to
18 your point, Councilman, we need to be
19 flexible in order to get this out the
20 door, and I think that's what you've seen
21 under the current leadership in all the
22 three agencies.

23 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: A hard
24 stance and benefit of the taxpayers
25 sometimes is a hard stance against the

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2 taxpayers.

3 MR. ABERNATHY: Agreed.

4 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: Because if
5 we can't get the parcels developed and we
6 take a hard line on the pricing, what are
7 we accomplishing?

8 MR. ABERNATHY: Agreed.

9 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: Because
10 it's still a vacant, non-tax producing
11 property.

12 MR. ABERNATHY: Agreed. And
13 while I certainly don't have any problems
14 with a developer making a profit; in
15 fact, I strongly encourage that, there is
16 a line that the developer shouldn't make
17 a profit at the expense of the taxpayer.

18 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: But don't
19 we expect a lot of these developers to be
20 the CDCs that have been pushing for the
21 Land Bank in the first place?

22 MR. ABERNATHY: Absolutely, and
23 any CDC project we have sold at nominal
24 value.

25 COUNCILMAN KENNEY: All right.

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2 Thank you.

3 COUNCILMAN HENON: Thank you,
4 Councilman.

5 The Chair recognizes Majority
6 Leader Jones.

7 COUNCILMAN JONES: Thank you,
8 Mr. Chairman, for your allowing me to
9 speak.

10 First, let me applaud my
11 colleague for at least raising the issue
12 of land banking, and it's an important
13 issue that affects every neighborhood,
14 particularly, according to some reports,
15 North Philadelphia and West Philadelphia.
16 So it's vital.

17 Councilman Green talked about a
18 report earlier. I think it was the
19 Brophy report that talked about a
20 restructuring of housing redevelopment in
21 PHDC a long time ago, about how to do
22 that. My question is more related to the
23 vacant land management report that you
24 helped shepherd into existence. I think
25 it was 2010, and it talked about some of

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2 the problems of land, and my question
3 becomes how does this report match up to
4 that legislation and how does it take
5 into account -- you mentioned in the last
6 part of the report the dialogue with the
7 state, and I would guess you were talking
8 about Representative Taylor's bill on
9 acquisition of properties.

10 How is that dialogue developed
11 and is that a part of where we are today?

12 MR. CARPENTER: Thank you for
13 your question. The report that was
14 produced in 2010 tried to paint a very
15 clear picture of how things were
16 happening in the City at that time and
17 argued for a simpler way of disposing of
18 property and an easier process for
19 absorbing that property into the market
20 and then described some of the benefits
21 that would occur. I believe the Land
22 Bank, as it's proposed in the
23 legislation, generally fits well inside
24 the context of that report and is a good
25 next step in moving towards the simpler

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2 systems that that report had envisioned.

3 COUNCILMAN JONES: Can you
4 articulate for me in layperson's terms
5 how this current system would be
6 expedited and in what ways specifically
7 if we were to move this legislation into
8 fruition. Articulate that for me for the
9 record.

10 MR. KOONCE: I think having all
11 of the properties or the majority of the
12 properties in one place, the Philadelphia
13 Land Bank, having a single point of
14 entry, having one application process,
15 making sure that process is transparent,
16 I think that alone makes -- would make
17 the Land Bank bill worthwhile for me as
18 opposed to having to deal with three or
19 four different agencies, different
20 processes and not a lot of transparency.

21 COUNCILMAN JONES: Can you tell
22 me how that is different from the Vacant
23 Property Review Committee?

24 MR. KOONCE: Currently the
25 properties conveyed, surplus properties

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2 conveyed by the City, need to be conveyed
3 one of two ways. One would be by a
4 public process or they would need to go
5 through the VPRC process, which a citizen
6 or a developer would come in to the VPRC
7 staff, request a property or they would
8 come in online and request a property.
9 Staff would vet the project and make a
10 recommendation at VPRC. VPRC would then
11 either approve or disapprove of the
12 resolution. If the resolution is
13 approved, then it would go to City Law
14 for a deed, then it would go through the
15 Redevelopment Authority. Once the deed
16 came through, it would go to the
17 Redevelopment Authority Board for
18 approval and subsequently conveyance to
19 the developer or the citizen.

20 COUNCILMAN JONES: How is that
21 different than what is being --

22 MR. KOONCE: After Council
23 approval, of course.

24 COUNCILMAN JONES: I don't have
25 a dog in that fight at this point, but I

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2 want to know how it's different, what
3 before/after on a matrix, how is it
4 different and how would it be more
5 efficient.

6 MR. KOONCE: Well, I think just
7 having, as I said earlier, I think having
8 one point of contact for all of the
9 properties makes it more efficient. I
10 think just having -- instead of having
11 the process -- and, once again, I haven't
12 read all the amendments, so I may make --
13 I may not be privy to everything that's
14 planned, but it would be a very simple
15 process of staff reviewing a disposition
16 that came in, approving it, resolution of
17 City Council -- I'm sorry; resolution of
18 the Philadelphia Land Bank and a
19 resolution of City Council.

20 COUNCILMAN JONES: What would
21 be helpful to me, Mr. Chairman --

22 MR. KOONCE: A matrix?

23 COUNCILMAN JONES: -- if you
24 could request a matrix that shows before
25 and after that would clearly -- if there

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2 are 52 steps under the current process,
3 if we're knocking them down to 40 or 20,
4 to be able to see that in a PERT chart.
5 If indeed if we were really getting
6 fancy, the cost of each of those steps,
7 if they could be eliminated.

8 I mean, I'm not trying to make
9 you bring me the broom of the Wicked
10 Witch of the West, but I do for analysis
11 purpose want to see that. And at the end
12 of the day, your report did a good job of
13 talking about the cost to Philadelphians
14 on holding costs. So if in fact one
15 process is better than the other and it
16 reduces those but not just to throw it in
17 the air and say it will, but factually
18 show us how, that would be helpful for
19 me, Mr. Chairman.

20 COUNCILMAN HENON: Thank you,
21 Majority Leader.

22 MR. KOONCE: And we can provide
23 that information. We can provide that
24 matrix of both processes, both as is now
25 and as we envision it with the

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2 Philadelphia Land Bank.

3 COUNCILMAN HENON: If you
4 provide that to the Chair, I'll
5 distribute it to all the members of this
6 body.

7 MR. KOONCE: Will do.

8 COUNCILMAN HENON: Thank you.

9 The Chair recognizes
10 Councilwoman Sanchez.

11 COUNCILWOMAN SANCHEZ: Thank
12 you. I just want to kind of clarify a
13 few points, and I don't want to belabor
14 them, because I think some of the folks
15 will talk about it.

16 This process is about
17 toolboxes, and I appreciate Councilman
18 Jones's question, because I think they're
19 very important. Unlike a tax bill,
20 there's a lot of operationalizing to this
21 that we have to talk through, because
22 ultimately it is about resources, and I
23 spoke to that a little earlier.

24 PRA is the creation of the
25 state that gives us the toolbox. It's

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2 eminent domain. It's very costly, but
3 it's very important, and all of us use it
4 for tax credit deals, and that's why the
5 discussion about what goes into the Land
6 Bank and what stays at VPRC is a Council
7 decision, because it depends on what
8 their development strategy is.

9 PHDC is a toolbox. It allows
10 us to clear municipal liens, and it's one
11 that we should continue to utilize and
12 figure out how the tool is used.

13 VPRC is our creation also.
14 That is a toolbox. And then the Land
15 Bank providing the final tool, which is
16 allowing us to acquire delinquent parcels
17 in a cheaper way and expediting the cost
18 to the end user.

19 The only thing that I will
20 caution, because I do think it is very
21 real that we got to talk about a budget,
22 how Council agrees with the
23 Administration that this gets
24 operationalized, and then the resources
25 we put into it are going to be important.

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2 Right now the City of Philadelphia is one
3 of few large jurisdictions that puts no
4 general operating money in our CDBG
5 allocation. Our Community Block Grant
6 money comes with a lot of strings and
7 attachments. It's tied in to poverty
8 rates, it's tied in to job creation, and
9 it's tied in to affordable housing.

10 Our ability to put general
11 operating money will allow the Land Bank,
12 I believe -- and this is something that,
13 again, policy and some of the strategic
14 planning pieces -- will allow us to
15 leverage our resources so that when we're
16 doing a project that is based on goals
17 that may not be specific to the federal
18 government, that we can do that. And I
19 think we've seen that in some of the work
20 we've tried to do around some of the
21 commercial development stuff and others
22 where the restrictions of federal dollars
23 limits our ability to do the right thing
24 on some of the commercial corridors.

25 So I think all of those

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2 questions are legitimate. I think even
3 the flowchart and what we want to see, I
4 think some of those we still need to work
5 through as we look at the budget
6 allocation.

7 There's a couple of discussions
8 that will be added to this, again, as we
9 operationalize it. We currently spend,
10 as many of the reports have shown,
11 Econsult and others, around \$20 million
12 on vacant land, when you look at what's
13 at L&I, when you look at other buckets.
14 And clearly we want to leverage those
15 better, but I think there has to be a
16 general agreement that what we're doing
17 now is not the best. So sometimes the
18 savings can't be short term because we
19 want to do our job better. And so as the
20 District Councilperson, I'm sure you are
21 acutely aware when you want to get stuff
22 clean and sealed and maintained
23 appropriately, that's called priceless
24 sometimes for us, particularly for the
25 neighbor that lives next door.

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2 So I think this is about
3 toolboxes. I think all of the issues
4 that are brought up, some of them we will
5 continue to -- we have to continue to
6 work through, because ultimately it's
7 about the resources.

8 So thank you. I just wanted to
9 clarify this. This is a different
10 toolbox to the ones we have and we will
11 continue to utilize.

12 Thank you, Mr. Chair.

13 COUNCILMAN HENON: Thank you,
14 Councilwoman.

15 Are there any other questions
16 from the panel committee?

17 (No response.)

18 COUNCILMAN HENON: With that
19 being said, no more questions for the
20 Administration. I appreciate your time,
21 and if you could provide to the Chair
22 some of the requests that the Committee
23 had, we'd appreciate it.

24 With that --

25 MR. KOONCE: We will. Thank

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2 you.

3 COUNCILMAN HENON: Thank you.

4 With that, we are going to

5 start our public testimony in panels.

6 And, again, I want to reiterate, we are

7 going to be pressed for time as far as

8 limiting the testimony to three minutes.

9 Again, three minutes for each testimony.

10 The first panel, Tom Earle,

11 Rick Sauer.

12 And, for the record, I also

13 would like to recognize Councilwoman

14 Blondell Reynolds Brown.

15 (Witnesses approached witness

16 table.)

17 MR. EARLE: Good morning.

18 COUNCILMAN HENON: Good

19 morning. State your name for the record

20 and proceed with your testimony.

21 MR. EARLE: My name is Thomas

22 Earle. I'm the current President and CEO

23 of Liberty Resources and a member of the

24 Taking Back Our Vacant Land Campaign. We

25 are here -- I'm here to provide an

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2 overview of our testimony in support of
3 the Land Bank in its present form,
4 including its strategic planning
5 requirements.

6 Councilman Henon, members of
7 the Public Property Committee, and other
8 residents who want to see blighted
9 properties in Philadelphia put back to
10 productive use, my name is Tom Earle.
11 I'm with Liberty Resources, and three
12 years ago Liberty Resources helped found
13 the Campaign to Take Back Our Vacant Land
14 Coalition, which has now grown into a
15 citywide coalition of more than 45 faith,
16 labor, and community groups committed to
17 ensuring that Philadelphia tackles our
18 city's vacant land crisis and does so in
19 a way that benefits the hardworking,
20 longstanding residents of our city.

21 Many of our fellow citizens
22 struggle to make ends meet, whether
23 that's a roof over their heads in a
24 decent, affordable, accessible home,
25 enough food to eat or places to shop in

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2 their own neighborhoods. A Land Bank, if
3 done correctly, can do these things in a
4 correct manner and change our
5 neighborhoods into productive uses.

6 I am proud to speak to you
7 today on behalf of the Coalition, and I'm
8 delighted to have worked alongside such a
9 strong and diverse group. I do want to
10 give special acknowledgment to the
11 members of the Steering Committee of our
12 Coalition, which are the United Food and
13 Commercial Food Workers Local 1776, the
14 AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power, the Poor
15 People's Economic Human Rights Campaign,
16 the East Park Revitalization Alliance,
17 Disabled in Action, Women's Community
18 Revitalization Project, and our many
19 members at District 1199C.

20 There are three areas that I'd
21 like to highlight in the ordinance as
22 currently proposed in March, and
23 obviously we've heard some testimony this
24 morning about one of the major goals is
25 Philadelphia simply has too many

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2 properties that are vacant or blighted.

3 Numbers estimate this at 40,000

4 properties. Our city's -- all of these

5 properties, instead of being scattered

6 across an alphabet soup of agencies,

7 could be put into one entity, a new Land

8 Bank. And we have too few tools, as

9 Councilwoman Sanchez has aptly pointed

10 out, to make sure that these properties

11 don't continue to sit in the hands of

12 speculators who do little to nothing to

13 improve their neighborhoods where these

14 properties sit.

15 Thanks to the legislation --

16 (Applause.)

17 MR. EARLE: -- passed in

18 Harrisburg last year under the leadership

19 of State Representative John Taylor, the

20 City of Philadelphia now has a tool to

21 proceed forward with the Land Bank and to

22 acquire tax-delinquent properties without

23 risking their sale to speculators. This

24 is a tremendous powerful tool that does

25 not previously exist.

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2 COUNCILMAN HENON: Excuse me,
3 Mr. Earle. If you could -- time is
4 moving forward here. For the sake of
5 expediency here, could you summarize the
6 rest of your testimony and it will be
7 submitted for the record, please.

8 MR. EARLE: Sure. The other
9 element that we fully support, Councilman
10 Henon, is the fairness aspect to the
11 bill; in particular, Section
12 16-709(3)(c), which specifically
13 addresses the strategic planning process.
14 We think this is very important and
15 absent from any current instrument that
16 the City has in its toolbox. We want to
17 make sure that this is mandatory, that
18 these strategic planning requirements and
19 goals to consider equitable data in
20 particular neighborhoods, to make sure
21 that these properties and buildings can
22 be reused for useful purposes of
23 affordable, accessible housing, community
24 gardens, urban agriculture, and other
25 free space and green space --

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2 (Applause.)

3 MR. EARLE: -- are not an
4 option. We've seen too many options
5 where these goals are stated but never
6 enforced, and we want to make sure that
7 the language that currently reads "that
8 may be used" is very clearly made "shall
9 be used." It should be mandatory. We
10 want strategic planning and specific
11 goals for these reusing of the
12 properties.

13 The last point that I'd like to
14 highlight to the Committee members is
15 that this will also help with
16 transparency. We're now at a time where
17 City government is sometimes viewed as a
18 lot of deals happening behind closed
19 doors. We need to end that image. The
20 transparency element will be enhanced by
21 having four community members appointed,
22 two by City Council, two by the Mayor,
23 and this helps with imposing a government
24 with people for the people and a Land
25 Bank that we can trust.

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2 COUNCILMAN HENON: Mr. Earle,
3 thank you for your testimony.

4 (Applause.)

5 COUNCILMAN HENON: Mr. Sauer,
6 if you could summarize your written
7 testimony and then submit your written
8 testimony for the record, we would
9 appreciate it.

10 MR. SAUER: Yes. I did provide
11 written testimony, longer written
12 testimony, up there. So I'll do a
13 shorter summary.

14 COUNCILMAN HENON: If you could
15 summarize that, please.

16 MR. SAUER: Thank you. So
17 thank you, Chairman Henon and other
18 members of City Council, for the
19 opportunity to testify today. My name is
20 Rick Sauer and I'm the Executive Director
21 of the Philadelphia Association of
22 Community Development Corporations.

23 PACDC is also a member of the
24 Philly Land Bank Alliance, which is a
25 diverse coalition of non-profit and

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2 for-profit organizations that invest in
3 Philadelphia and its people by building
4 affordable and market-rate homes,
5 supporting small businesses, creating
6 green space, addressing food access, and
7 revitalizing our communities. You're
8 going to hear from many of those folks
9 today. I'd like to thank Councilwoman
10 Sanchez and her staff for their hard work
11 in crafting legislation to create an
12 effective Philadelphia Land Bank that has
13 the strong support of these stakeholders.

14 As you know, Philadelphia has a
15 vacant property epidemic, blighting our
16 communities, deterring investment,
17 diverting critical resources, and
18 depriving the City and School District of
19 revenue they so desperately need. On top
20 of that, our system of getting these
21 properties back into the hands of
22 responsible new private owners is broken
23 and in desperate need of reform.

24 At our current rate, it's going
25 to take us 50 to 100 years to get the

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2 properties that are already in the City's
3 inventory just out the door, and that
4 doesn't begin to address the tens of
5 thousands of other privately owned
6 tax-delinquent properties that are vacant
7 in the City.

8 Ownership of public property is
9 spread across multiple public agencies,
10 as we heard before, each with a different
11 timeline and a different set of rules.
12 And transferring these properties
13 currently requires the involvement of
14 multiple departments and a vote of City
15 Council on each individual parcel. It's
16 an even more daunting challenge if you're
17 trying to assemble multiple properties
18 for a redevelopment project. And as a
19 result, it can be years before someone
20 who is seeking public property actually
21 gets it.

22 For these reasons, we urge you
23 to vote in favor of Bill No. 130156,
24 which would create an effective
25 Philadelphia Land Bank that would

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2 consolidate publicly owned vacant
3 property under one roof and provide a
4 streamlined process for their
5 disposition. The residents of
6 Philadelphia's neighborhoods that are
7 saddled with vacant properties and
8 stakeholders working to revitalize these
9 communities deserve an efficient,
10 accountable, transparent, predictable,
11 and equitable Land Bank and Council
12 process.

13 (Applause.)

14 MR. SAUER: They deserve a Land
15 Bank and Council process that will get
16 public properties into the hands of
17 private owners quickly, in three months,
18 not three years. They deserve a Land
19 Bank and Council process that can tell
20 them up front whether or not they will
21 gain ownership of a parcel before they
22 invest significant time and resources.
23 They deserve a process that operates
24 transparently and gives them a reason if
25 their application for a parcel is denied.

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2 They deserve a process that is equitable
3 and balances the needs of market-rate
4 housing, affordable housing, business
5 development, green spaces, and community
6 gathering spaces. And they deserve a
7 process that is accountable to
8 performance measures by ensuring data is
9 published and evaluated on how the reform
10 processes is working.

11 The bill before you today as
12 introduced gives Philadelphians what we
13 deserve and has the united support of the
14 15 diverse citywide organizations that
15 make up the Philly Land Bank Alliance.

16 COUNCILMAN HENON: Excuse me,
17 Mr. Sauer, if you could wrap up your
18 testimony, please.

19 MR. SAUER: So in closing, as
20 you consider any potential amendments to
21 this legislation, we urge you to only
22 support amendments that will make the
23 process of acquiring vacant parcels and
24 transferring them to private ownership
25 more efficient, more transparent, and

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2 more equitable.

3 We want to thank you, Chairman
4 Henon, for convening today's hearing, for
5 Councilwoman Sanchez and the co-sponsors
6 for moving this legislation forward, and
7 for the Mayor and his Administration for
8 their leadership in working to end
9 Philadelphia's vacancy epidemic and
10 supporting an effective Philadelphia Land
11 Bank.

12 So on behalf of the more than
13 100 organizations and 400 individuals
14 that have endorsed an effective Land Bank
15 to turn our empty vacant spaces into
16 vibrant, useful places, we urge the
17 Committee to report this bill favorably
18 with a favorable recommendation today,
19 because we can't afford any further
20 delays.

21 COUNCILMAN HENON: Thank you.

22 MR. SAUER: Thank you.

23 COUNCILMAN HENON: Thank you
24 for your testimony.

25 (Applause.)

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2 COUNCILMAN HENON: Does anybody
3 from the Committee have any questions for
4 this panel?

5 (No response.)

6 COUNCILMAN HENON: Thank you
7 both for your testimony.

8 Clerk, would you read the next
9 panel, please.

10 THE CLERK: Next panel, Anne
11 Fadullon, Allan Domb, and Alan Mallach.
12 The following panel after this panel will
13 be John Myerson, German Parodi, and
14 Connie Morrow.

15 (Witnesses approached witness
16 table.)

17 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Good
18 morning. Please identify yourself and
19 proceed. Remember, three-minute rule
20 here.

21 MS. FADULLON: My name is Anne
22 Fadullon and I'm the Vice President of
23 the Building Industry Association, which
24 represents the region's residential home
25 builders, residential contractors and

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2 suppliers. We'd like to thank Chairman
3 Henon and the members of the Public
4 Property Committee for allowing us to
5 testify on Bill No. 130156, establishing
6 a Land Bank in the City of Philadelphia.
7 We'd also like to thank Councilwoman
8 Sanchez for her leadership on this issue.

9 As part of the Philly Land Bank
10 Alliance, a broad-based coalition of
11 advocacy groups encompassing both the
12 for- and non-profit sectors, housing
13 business and open space development, the
14 BIA supports this legislation to
15 establish one owner of publicly owned
16 vacant land, one inventory of vacant
17 land, one process for the transfer of
18 publicly owned vacant land, one standard
19 of maintenance, and one standard of
20 enforcement to hold vacant landowners
21 accountable.

22 The vital components to a
23 successful Land Bank are a clear,
24 transparent, and predictable process.
25 Publicly held vacant land disposed of in

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2 an efficient, responsible manner has the
3 potential to create a much-needed
4 economic engine for Philadelphia.
5 Getting this land back out into
6 productive use should be the main
7 objective of the Land Bank.

8 It is imperative that any
9 interested buyer be provided assurance
10 that if they work through the process in
11 an earnest and responsible manner, they
12 will be provided the opportunity to
13 purchase the property in a reasonable and
14 known timeframe. Further, if that buyer
15 is denied for any reason, it is simply
16 common courtesy to provide them with a
17 valid reason for that denial.

18 The Land Bank will allow
19 Philadelphia to strategically acquire
20 tax-delinquent vacant properties and then
21 transfer these properties to responsible
22 buyers with the resources and intent to
23 put these properties back into productive
24 use in the near term. The Land Bank has
25 the potential to turn publicly held

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2 properties, currently a substantial
3 economic drain to the City, back into
4 productive use and serve as an
5 opportunity for a much-needed economic
6 revitalization. Final Land Bank
7 legislation should ensure that the best
8 interests of the economic health of the
9 City is what drives the disposition of
10 publicly held properties and the Land
11 Bank does not turn into another
12 indefinite holding tank for properties,
13 which in turn will only prolong and
14 further the blighting influence of these
15 properties on the neighborhoods of
16 Philadelphia.

17 The BIA urges City Council to
18 support Bill No. 130156 to establish a
19 fair, transparent, and predictable Land
20 Bank in Philadelphia.

21 The members of the Building
22 Industry Association look forward to
23 continuing the fruitful dialogue we have
24 with City Council about how best to
25 support and facilitate meaningful

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2 development in the City of Philadelphia.

3 Thank you for your
4 consideration.

5 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Thank
6 you. Thank you, Ms. Fadullon.

7 Ms. Capozzi or whoever would
8 like to go next. Please identify
9 yourself and proceed.

10 MR. MALLACH: Thank you,
11 Mr. Chairman and members of the
12 Committee. My name is Alan Mallach. I'm
13 a senior fellow with the Center for
14 Community Progress, a non-resident senior
15 fellow with the Brookings Institution,
16 and a lifelong Phillies fan, and --

17 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: You
18 should have put that first.

19 MR. MALLACH: I've worked for
20 state and federal government -- state and
21 local government, not federal, for many
22 years and I've been working for the last
23 15 years on urban revitalization and
24 problem property issues, and I've
25 followed land banks around the country

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2 closely.

3 I'd like to make it clear, a
4 Land Bank is not a panacea and people who
5 expect that land banks to turn cities
6 like Flint around have been disappointed,
7 but I think -- and this is, I think, my
8 main point. Philadelphia is different.
9 And because it's different, I think a
10 Land Bank can be a tremendous boost for
11 Philadelphia's economy and financial
12 picture today.

13 Philadelphia has made
14 incredible strides over the last 10, 15
15 years in stabilizing its population and
16 recreating a strong housing market. In
17 the last two years, its population has
18 grown by 25,000 people, and in many parts
19 of the City, housing demand is strong,
20 and with the right steps, that demand
21 could spread elsewhere. It's fragile in
22 many places, but it's there.

23 And this is where the Land Bank
24 comes in, because if Philadelphia is
25 going to tap the potential demand for

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2 development that exists, land has to be
3 available for developers and non-profits
4 in a timely fashion on reasonable terms.
5 And realistically with so much of the
6 City's land tied up in public ownership,
7 tax delinquent, and with other problems,
8 the private real estate market is simply
9 not capable of supplying the amount of
10 land in a way that development can move
11 forward.

12 Land is basically a huge
13 bottleneck in Philadelphia's progress,
14 and that's where the Land Bank can make a
15 difference. If it can assemble
16 properties for multiple sources into a
17 single inventory, clear title on them,
18 and market them expeditiously to
19 qualified entities to do development that
20 benefits the neighborhoods and the City
21 and increases the real estate tax base,
22 that is a major achievement.

23 To do that, a Land Bank has to
24 do three things very well. It has to be
25 able to acquire property and control high

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2 as well as low-value properties, assemble
3 properties, and take properties through
4 the tax sale process. It also is going
5 to need to be able to maintain properties
6 at high quality. No matter how good it
7 is at disposing properties, it is going
8 to be, at any given point, holding an
9 inventory of vacant buildings and vacant
10 lots which it will need to maintain. So
11 the second task is to maintain those
12 properties well so they don't blight
13 neighborhoods.

14 Third, and the critical task,
15 is to be able to dispose of properties in
16 a responsible way for the public purpose
17 that will also maximize development and
18 neighborhood revitalization
19 opportunities.

20 There are three --

21 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE:

22 Mr. Mallach, if you could wrap up. I
23 gave you a little extra time since you're
24 a Phillies fan.

25 MR. MALLACH: I got three

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2 points. One is, developers need to know
3 in advance what they have to do to buy
4 properties. Secondly, that people know
5 what the process is, that it's
6 transparent. And, third, that it's made
7 quickly. Time is money, and if the Land
8 Bank is successful, developers will be
9 able to plan ahead, pull permits, and get
10 projects into the ground.

11 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Thank
12 you, Mr. Mallach.

13 MR. MALLACH: I urge you to
14 consider these issues. Thank you.

15 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE:

16 Ms. Capozzi.

17 MS. CAPOZZI: Hi. My name is
18 Barbara Capozzi. I'm the immediate past
19 President of the Greater Philadelphia
20 Association of Realtors. I'm not here as
21 a realtor or as a member of the Builders
22 Association. I'm just here as someone
23 who has common sense and knows how real
24 estate works.

25 The more cumbersome, the more

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2 subjective, the more dragged out this
3 process, the less the people that
4 really -- back here, our coalition is so
5 amazing, with 15 different groups. It's
6 not about -- you shouldn't have to know
7 somebody to get one of these parcels.

8 You shouldn't have to be a realtor, you
9 shouldn't have to be a lawyer, and you
10 shouldn't have to be a developer.

11 Frankly, I'm all three --

12 (Applause.)

13 MS. CAPOZZI: -- and I would
14 walk away from this process every day of
15 the week. I would walk away from it.
16 It's too cumbersome. It's too
17 subjective. You could get pulled at the
18 end, no reason, no rhyme.

19 This bill is a little step
20 forward. It's not as great as what I
21 would have liked to see, and we
22 understand there's amendments that we
23 actually have not even seen, after
24 working on this. The Greater
25 Philadelphia Association of Realtors has

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2 been working on this with the
3 Redevelopment Authority through ten
4 different name changes, ten different
5 processes. I agree with Councilman
6 Jones. I tried to do a flowchart. We
7 all did. Everyone back here tried to do
8 a flowchart and a matrix. It's crazy.
9 It's impossible. As it is right now and
10 even with this legislation, it's
11 impossible.

12 You know our mantra is one
13 owner, one database, one system, one
14 process, one maintenance code, one way to
15 enforce all this. There's just no other
16 way to do it.

17 We're all here as a resource to
18 you. GPAR has put its formal testimony
19 in writing, and I hope you take the time
20 to read it since we've been working on
21 this -- everybody here has gone to
22 hundreds of meetings, thousands of
23 e-mails, and read tons of documents.
24 This is just my file from the last three
25 months.

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2 And please know that we do
3 respect Council's role. That's why we
4 want it up front. That's why we want
5 Council's say on these parcels up front.
6 And once you've passed on it, let it go
7 to the committee, let them do their work.
8 They're all good people, and we're all
9 here to help everybody get this through.
10 Again, the Greater Philadelphia
11 Association of Realtors is not concerned
12 about selling these parcels themselves,
13 but we know the value of getting these
14 parcels out of the City's hands and back
15 into the hands of churches, neighbors,
16 developers, CDCs that will really --
17 garden people. Anybody is better than
18 having the City own it. The City does
19 many things great, but one of them is not
20 own and maintain real estate. So please
21 get out of my business, and I will stay
22 out of yours. But if we can help you in
23 any way, we're here for you.

24 (Applause.)

25 COUNCILMAN HENON: The Chair

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2 recognizes Councilwoman Blondell Reynolds
3 Brown.

4 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: Thank you,
5 Mr. Chairman.

6 Good morning. I have paid
7 attention from the sidelines on this
8 issue under Councilwoman Sanchez's
9 leadership and those in the Mayor's
10 Administration, and I need to first
11 congratulate that a coalition of this
12 scale with so many different stakeholders
13 in and of itself is worthy of applause
14 and praise, and the stick-to-itiveness
15 that is clear has been an essential
16 element to get you to this point.

17 It seems to me an
18 understandable flowchart, again as a
19 listener sitting on the sidelines, seems
20 like a reasonable long-term goal as you
21 go down this road. My question is, is
22 there a municipality that can serve as a
23 template or that has a gold standard that
24 we can look to as a place we want to move
25 to when it comes to Land Bank and all of

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2 what that looks like?

3 MR. MALLACH: I think there's
4 some municipalities where you can learn
5 some useful things from. I don't think
6 there's any one that's really the model.
7 I think the Land Bank in Cuyahoga County,
8 which includes Cleveland, is probably the
9 one that I would look to most.

10 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: How old is
11 that Land Bank?

12 MR. MALLACH: About three to
13 four years.

14 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: Okay. And
15 typically that suggests there's some
16 lessons learned there that we can look at
17 to see what we can avoid, I guess, in
18 trying to move to the same place.

19 MR. MALLACH: Right. But I
20 think Philadelphia has a real asset that
21 Cleveland doesn't have, is that
22 Philadelphia has a lot more demand for
23 land that you can tap into than Cleveland
24 has, and that's a real strength of the
25 City.

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2 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: All right,
3 then. Any others?

4 MS. CAPOZZI: But that demand
5 comes and goes, and right now that demand
6 is at its peak, and that's why if any
7 process could get started -- in any
8 business it's about supply and demand,
9 but right now things are percolating
10 again and there is a demand for these
11 lots. So there might be more active
12 participation in the system even though
13 at best it's painful, even at best if
14 it's painful, but now we should
15 capitalize on that demand and get going
16 while the banks might lend money or --

17 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: Given the
18 environment that we're living in now.

19 MS. CAPOZZI: Right.

20 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: My final
21 question on the flip side of that, where
22 does Philadelphia rank when it comes to
23 the number of vacant parcels that we have
24 compared to similarly situated cities?

25 MR. MALLACH: Well, the best

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2 guess is Philadelphia has about 40,000
3 vacant lots.

4 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: And that's
5 been the case since I was on the Board at
6 OHCD.

7 MR. MALLACH: And the fact that
8 Philadelphia's condition has been
9 improving in many respects is why that
10 hasn't taken off. It's just been -- but
11 it's been steady, because the City hasn't
12 been able really to tackle that long-term
13 inventory of vacant land. I mean, in
14 terms of numbers, Philadelphia has one of
15 the biggest probably because Philadelphia
16 is a big city. It's far less than
17 Detroit, for example. It's probably on
18 par with a city like Cleveland, which has
19 half the population, less than half the
20 population, but a much weaker demand.
21 And then it's about on par also -- has
22 more than St. Louis, but in percentage
23 terms, cities like Cleveland and Detroit
24 and St. Louis do have a lot more vacant
25 properties than Philadelphia.

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2 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: Okay,
3 then. Thank you for your testimony.
4 Very informative.

5 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

6 COUNCILMAN HENON: Excuse me.
7 The Chair recognizes Councilman Green.

8 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Thank you.

9 I was down in my office
10 listening to your testimony, and I just
11 want to say thank you for -- thank all of
12 you for testifying, but especially the
13 gentleman from the Brookings Institution,
14 who gave what I thought was the best
15 explanation for why we need a Land Bank
16 and why it will be effective in
17 Philadelphia that I've heard in testimony
18 today. I want to associate myself with
19 your comments and say that's why I'll be
20 voting for the bill. So thank you.

21 MR. MALLACH: Thank you,
22 Councilman.

23 (Applause.)

24 COUNCILMAN HENON: Any further
25 questions?

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2 (No response.)

3 COUNCILMAN HENON: Thank you
4 for your testimony.

5 Next panel, please, Clerk.

6 THE CLERK: John Myerson,
7 German Parodi, and Connie Morrow. The
8 panel following them will be Amy Cahn,
9 Drew Becher, and Charles Branas.

10 (Witnesses approached witness
11 table.)

12 COUNCILMAN HENON: Good
13 morning. Can you please state your name
14 for the record and proceed with your
15 testimony. Again, if you have written
16 testimony, please summarize it, and we
17 will absolutely welcome your written
18 testimony into the record.

19 MR. MORROW: Thank you. Good
20 morning, Councilman. My name is
21 Constance Morrow. I'm a long lifetime
22 resident of the City of Philadelphia. I
23 always lived in the 5th or the 7th
24 District. I lived in 2300 block of
25 Germantown Avenue for the last past 33

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2 years. I'm a parent. I'm a grandparent.
3 I'm a block captain, and I always be very
4 active in my community. I also been a
5 member of the Women's Community
6 Revitalization Project since 2006.

7 As a long resident of North
8 Philly, I always been slighted in the
9 community. That's just not fair. It's
10 2013. The City has the -- everyone in
11 the City has the opportunity to live in a
12 decent, safe neighborhood, as the Land
13 Bank would make this possible.

14 There is a generation of blight
15 that surround my home on Germantown
16 Avenue. There is never a moment that I
17 can escape the filth, the trash of both
18 sides of the lots. It has become one of
19 most legal dump sites throughout the City
20 of Philadelphia. Some mornings I come
21 outside there's a pile of garbage from
22 the night before that has grown taller
23 than me. You can't even walk on the
24 pavement, for so much junk that has
25 spilled out from the lots onto the

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2 sidewalk. It's getting to the point I
3 can't even sit outside and enjoy my front
4 or less having a barbecue in my backyard
5 because of the rats, the raccoons, the
6 trash, and all debris that breezed into
7 my yard.

8 And that's -- I called 3-1-1 so
9 many times that now they begin knowing me
10 by my voice. The most thing I hate about
11 this situation is that my grandchildren
12 are -- I feel like my grandchildren are
13 living the same way that I did when I was
14 a child almost 59 years ago. I made it
15 my job sometimes to go out there to clean
16 these lots up, and the things that I
17 found on these lots is like dirty
18 needles, used condoms, beer bottles, and
19 all sorts of disgusting things that no
20 child should have to experience.

21 My neighborhood never been
22 cleaned or safe because of the lot
23 crisis. As the Land Bank fair, I'm
24 asking -- I would like to make these lots
25 productive, affordable in my neighborhood

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2 and our city so we can endorse that the
3 land will be used to create accessible
4 houses for our residents as well as
5 create jobs, business, facilities, open
6 space, but, most of all, we can bring
7 some type of unity back to our
8 neighborhood.

9 I'm asking you today to vote
10 for this land as it is out of the
11 committee so the City can pass the bill
12 by the end of the year. Now it's time
13 for transparent, accessible, affordable
14 to put these lots and old buildings back
15 to use by our community. So vote yes on
16 this bill today.

17 Thank you very much.

18 COUNCILMAN HENON: Thank you.

19 (Applause.)

20 COUNCILMAN HENON: Can you
21 state your name for the record and
22 proceed with a summarized testimony,
23 please.

24 MR. PARODI: My name is German
25 Parodi. Good morning, Councilman Henon,

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2 members of the Public and Property Works.

3 I want to personally thank Councilwoman

4 Sanchez for all the work that she's done

5 in making Bill 130156 a reality and

6 hopefully will put those through Council.

7 Again, my name is German Luis

8 Parodi. I'm a resident of District 7 for

9 eight years. I'm a Board member of

10 Disabled in Action of Pennsylvania, a

11 grassroots organization run by people

12 with disabilities, which was established

13 over 30 years ago and advocates for

14 rights of people with disabilities.

15 We've been working for over 20 years to

16 increase the amount of permanent,

17 accessible, affordable, integrated

18 housing throughout the City, and we're

19 also members of the Campaign to Take Back

20 Vacant Land.

21 I'm here today to tell you why

22 a fair, transparent, accountable Land

23 Bank is so important to me personally. I

24 joined the movement of the Philadelphia

25 Land Bank because daily throughout the

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2 City as I am on my way to go to
3 college -- I'm a Temple University
4 student -- abandoned houses with trash
5 piles with garbage on their entrances. I
6 see abandoned parcels of land with trash
7 spread all around. Once by Huntington
8 and Kensington, children playing in a
9 similar lot with an old wheel and pieces
10 of chipped wood. I see lots on streets
11 like American that once were proposed by
12 the City to be prosperous through
13 programs like the Neighborhood
14 Empowerment Zones and now completely
15 barren.

16 I've been personally impacted
17 by the lack of permanent, affordable,
18 accessible, integrated housing and
19 accessible businesses. When I moved to
20 Philadelphia in 2004, I found it very
21 difficult to find a house that would meet
22 my needs as someone who uses a
23 wheelchair. It took me over five years
24 to find a place that I could afford and I
25 could access without much remodeling.

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2 Now I'm a proud homeowner.

3 However, during this time, I
4 had to live in a small apartment that was
5 not accessible for me to go in and out
6 because it had steps. I could not
7 participate much in the community, as I
8 always needed someone to help me in and
9 out. A number of times I remember
10 getting stuck under the rain in the
11 middle of winter over two hours waiting
12 for someone to help me in and out.

13 My ability obviously to look
14 for potential employment, being involved
15 with my church, and my personal life was
16 things I could not do as easily as I
17 would like to if my house would have been
18 accessible. The unavailability of
19 permanent, affordable, accessible,
20 integrated housing is immense throughout
21 our city, and people with disabilities
22 and their families are unnecessarily
23 paying the consequences as I did.

24 On the matter of inaccessible
25 businesses, what can I say? They're

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2 throughout the City, and why would I
3 spend my money on a place that I cannot
4 even go into? The issue of inaccessible
5 businesses permeates through our city,
6 from corner stores, small businesses, and
7 funeral homes. How frustrating it is not
8 only to have to deal with the common
9 funeral arrangements, but also a very
10 limited availability of options, as I had
11 to do three years ago with my
12 great-grandmother who passed away, and I
13 had to look over ten places, funeral
14 homes, that I could get into and be able
15 to visit her there. I mean, that's
16 horrible. It was to me and my family.

17 Small businesses undervalue
18 their customers with disabilities, and
19 Philadelphia having such a large disabled
20 community, we need to be integrated into
21 the development of our city, as hopefully
22 this Land Bank will make happen.

23 The bill will show us that the
24 people in the communities across the City
25 have joined in the movement and their

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2 voices have been heard. It sets the
3 priorities of a Land Bank that truly
4 benefits those who live in it like I do
5 and like my community does.

6 COUNCILMAN HENON: Can you
7 summarize that and wrap it up, please.

8 MR. PARODI: It is imperative
9 that when -- as we change our city to be
10 more accessible, to be more integrated,
11 these jobs that will be created by this,
12 that people with disabilities are not the
13 afterthought, that we are the
14 forethought, and as buildings and free
15 spaces are developed, that we can access
16 them. And I hope that you consider this
17 to be true, Councilman Henon.
18 Councilmembers, please make this bill
19 happen. We need it.

20 Thank you.

21 COUNCILMAN HENON: Thank you
22 for your testimony.

23 (Applause.)

24 COUNCILMAN HENON: Please state
25 your name for the record and proceed with

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2 the summarized testimony, please.

3 MR. MYERSON: Yes. You know
4 that will be hard for me, Mr. Chairman,
5 but I will try to keep my remarks short.

6 Thank you, Mr. Chairman,
7 members of the Committee, other members
8 of Council, Councilwoman Sanchez, for
9 advancing this bill and also a shout-out
10 to Representative John Taylor for
11 shepherding the state legislation that
12 made this possible.

13 My name is John Myerson. I'm
14 the Director of Legislation and Political
15 Action of the United Food and Commercial
16 Workers Local 1776. I'm here today on
17 behalf of the 23,000 members of UFCW
18 Local 1776, our President, Wendell Young,
19 IV, and our Executive Vice President, Don
20 McGrogan. I also want to point out of
21 those 23,000 members, over 7,300 of them
22 live in Philadelphia. Actually, there
23 used to be more, and that's part of the
24 reason why we feel it's important that we
25 testify here today in favor of this bill

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2 to create a Land Bank.

3 Our members are very concerned
4 in two areas. One is affordable,
5 accessible housing. Many of our members
6 have felt that they were forced to leave
7 the City in order to find housing for
8 themselves and their families. We have
9 7,300 who work in the City, but we're
10 probably another 3,000 who live outside
11 the City that commute back into the City
12 in order to work in supermarkets,
13 pharmacies, wine and spirits shops.

14 They didn't all leave the City
15 voluntarily. If there was good,
16 accessible housing, affordable housing in
17 their communities, they would have rather
18 stayed in Philadelphia and added to the
19 tax base.

20 (Applause.)

21 MR. MYERSON: We think it's
22 really crucial that we do this.

23 We also want to speak strongly
24 on the need for the strategic plan.
25 Philadelphia is not a one-size-fits-all

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2 city. We all know that from a commercial
3 point of view, there are large parts of
4 this city that are food deserts. There
5 are also parts of this city that are
6 already over-stored and are getting more
7 commercial development. We do need a
8 strategic plan to address this. Let's
9 get affordable housing where we need it.
10 Let's get economic activity where we need
11 it. Let's get some fresh food, community
12 gardens where we need it. And that's why
13 we need a strategic plan.

14 Our members in their
15 communities are tired of seeing, as
16 Chairman Henon, you know through your bad
17 neighbors stuff, so seeing the vacant
18 homes, to seeing blights in their
19 communities, and they want to see growth.
20 They want to see a growth of housing.
21 They want to see a growth of good jobs,
22 not bottom-feeders who are coming in from
23 out of state with no concern about the
24 communities, just plopping down stores so
25 they can make a few bucks that they're

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2 sending to Bentonville, Arkansas, Eden
3 Prairie, Minnesota or halfway around the
4 world.

5 (Applause.)

6 MR. MYERSON: So, again,
7 Mr. Chairman, we are proud to be a part
8 of this coalition and I am proud to be a
9 part of this panel, and we just want to
10 say that we would like to see this get
11 done. We understand that there are parts
12 that you have to look at. We're also
13 very much concerned with, as Councilwoman
14 Blackwell said and other people have
15 echoed, that the employees of the City of
16 Philadelphia are taken care of. But I
17 also urge you when you're looking at this
18 bill and possible amendments not to
19 make -- not to sacrifice the excellent at
20 the alter of the perfect and let's get
21 this done.

22 Thank you.

23 (Applause.)

24 COUNCILMAN HENON: Thank you
25 all for your testimony, and your written

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2 testimony will be submitted in the
3 record.

4 Clerk, could you read the next
5 panel, please.

6 THE CLERK: The next panel is
7 Amy Cahn, Drew Becher, Dick Voith, and if
8 John Kromer could step inside the rail
9 and have a seat, that would be great.
10 Thank you.

11 (Witnesses approached witness
12 table.)

13 COUNCILMAN HENON: If you could
14 state your name for the record and
15 proceed with your testimony. Again, if
16 you have written testimony, I would
17 respectfully ask that you summarize it,
18 and your full written testimony will be
19 submitted to the Clerk for our record.
20 Thank you.

21 MS. CAHN: Thank you, and thank
22 you for the opportunity to testify.
23 Thank you, Councilwoman, for all of your
24 leadership. I will cut to the chase. I
25 have very little voice, and I know I have

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2 very little time.

3 My name is Amy Laura Cahn. I
4 am testifying in my capacity as a staff
5 attorney at the Public Interest Law
6 Center of Philadelphia where, through our
7 Garden Justice Legal Initiative, I
8 provide pro bono legal and policy support
9 to Philadelphia's gardens and farms. The
10 Law Center believes in the power of urban
11 agriculture to build community assets,
12 foster youth leadership and
13 intergenerational relationships, support
14 economic independence and environmental
15 health, and eradicate blight. We believe
16 that the number of gardens in
17 Philadelphia may now exceed 800 on over
18 2,000 parcels. The City has for years
19 tacitly accepted gardening and farming as
20 a core strategy in blight reduction, but
21 has rarely offered a clear path to legal
22 access, much less permanence, even when
23 garden spaces have become undeniably sewn
24 into the fabric of the community.

25 My written testimony includes

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2 stories of the quagmire that is the
3 current process, including the story of
4 one set of spaces that have been in the
5 same community since the '30s and '40s
6 and still they struggle to keep that
7 land.

8 A viable Land Bank could
9 fundamentally transform the situation of
10 hardworking communities based on the
11 powers enumerated in the bill, to acquire
12 tax-delinquent land and clear title and
13 liens, to consolidate parcels now held by
14 multiple agencies, and to offer any
15 parcel for nominal or discounted sale if
16 the Land Bank Board recognizes the end
17 use to benefit the community. This is
18 crucial.

19 For newer gardens where the
20 transfer of title may not be appropriate
21 or the right first step, the Land Bank
22 has the potential to expedite the process
23 of obtaining leases or licenses, a
24 process that continues to take months and
25 years currently. The Law Center views

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2 these as critical opportunities to
3 incubate community-based non-profit and
4 for-profit enterprises, providing
5 neighbors with the chance to see
6 improvements happen more quickly and,
7 again, helping to rebuild trust.

8 We welcome a Land Bank that
9 ushers in a culture of openness and
10 engages the public in setting priorities,
11 developing policy, and planning for the
12 future of their neighborhoods. The
13 strategic planning component will be a
14 huge next step. The City needs to look
15 at existing resources and determine with
16 neighborhoods what they need when making
17 vacant land decisions. Concurrently,
18 gardeners and farmers will want to
19 understand plans for particular parcels
20 and the surrounding area before putting
21 down roots. This will be facilitated not
22 just by planning, but timely on-site
23 notification, which is in the current
24 bill; clear communication between Land
25 Bank staff, neighbors, and community

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2 groups, which doesn't happen often enough
3 now; and accessible data and tracking
4 systems. For a Land Bank to make a
5 difference, particularly for community
6 members without an advocate or political
7 savvy or for whom English may not be a
8 first language, we need a predictable,
9 transparent, equitable process that is
10 the same for everyone.

11 The benefits of gardens and
12 farms are only realized after significant
13 input of time and financial resources.
14 When land status remains uncertain,
15 investment from non-profits, residents,
16 and funders alike can wane, putting
17 important work in jeopardy. It is my
18 hope that a viable Land Bank will provide
19 the City and this Council the opportunity
20 to restore the trust of its constituents
21 who have struggled for years to gain
22 legal access and long-term land tenure
23 with no clear way forward.

24 Thanks for the opportunity to
25 speak today.

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2 COUNCILMAN HENON: Thank you
3 for your testimony.

4 (Applause.)

5 MR. BECHER: Good afternoon,
6 Councilman Henon and members of the
7 Committee. My name is Drew Becher,
8 President of Pennsylvania Horticultural
9 Society, and I'm pleased to testify today
10 on the great benefits of a strong Land
11 Bank in the City of Philadelphia.

12 For more than a decade, PHS has
13 worked in partnership with the City, its
14 agencies, and members of Council to clean
15 and green more than 8,000 vacant lots
16 through our Philadelphia LandCare
17 Program. The work has been done in
18 coordination with not just City agencies
19 but members of the community and their
20 community organizations. The results
21 have been clear. Studies by the
22 University of Pennsylvania has shown that
23 every dollar spent on cleaning and
24 greening vacant properties generates an
25 additional \$224 in housing wealth and

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2 \$7.43 in property tax revenue for the
3 City. We have major improvements in
4 crime, health, stress, safety in
5 neighborhoods with cleaned and greened
6 parcels.

7 In addition to the great work
8 we do through our LandCare Program, PHS
9 manages the Neighborhood Garden Trust, a
10 non-profit organization with more than 30
11 gardens throughout the City. These
12 gardens include Southwark/Queen Village
13 Community Garden, Bel Arbor Community
14 Garden, and the brand new Mantua Urban
15 Peace Garden, which are treasured assets
16 that build community, increase safety,
17 promote healthy eating, and provide
18 educational opportunities for
19 neighborhood residents. They also are
20 productive uses of formerly vacant land
21 and the kind of uses that are strong,
22 well supported that this Land Bank would
23 enable.

24 Since 1986, the Neighborhood
25 Garden Trust, or NGT, has been the City's

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2 leader in supporting community gardens
3 and gardeners. In that time, NGT has
4 nurtured land in many cases no one else
5 wanted and ensured that community
6 residents would use the land to green
7 their neighborhoods and their lives.

8 While NGT acquires and manages land for
9 community gardens, PHS provides ongoing
10 services to ensure the garden is
11 successful.

12 But the City boasts possibly
13 hundreds more properties that could be
14 started by NGT if only we had a clear,
15 simple, more transparent land disposition
16 process. It is our sincere hope that the
17 Land Bank will streamline and daylight
18 this process, enabling NGT and PHS to do
19 much more for the City and its residents.

20 An effective Land Bank would
21 provide an essential tool that will
22 complement both NGT's mission to preserve
23 and protect gardens and open space and
24 PHS's LandCare cleaning/greening work.

25 With these other strong, highly

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2 functioning programs already in place,
3 the Land Bank is the missing piece of the
4 puzzle. Today we encourage you to
5 complete this picture. And I'd like to
6 thank Councilman Henon and the other
7 members of the Committee for the
8 opportunity to speak and be happy to
9 answer any questions.

10 Thank you so much.

11 COUNCILMAN HENON: Thank you
12 for your testimony.

13 (Applause.)

14 COUNCILMAN HENON: State your
15 name for the record and please summarize
16 your testimony.

17 MR. VOITH: Good afternoon,
18 Councilman Henon and members of Council.
19 Thank you for the opportunity to provide
20 information on the cost of vacant land in
21 Philadelphia and the potential benefits
22 of addressing the City's vacant land
23 problem.

24 My name is Richard Voith. I am
25 President of the Philadelphia-based

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2 Econsult Solutions Incorporated. I'm
3 also a faculty fellow at the University
4 of Pennsylvania and student for urban
5 research.

6 Econsult Solutions and its
7 predecessor firm, Econsult Corporation,
8 has worked extensively on an array of
9 issues affecting the City, including the
10 impact of vacant land and the vacant,
11 abandoned properties. Reducing the
12 number of vacant properties in the City
13 is one area where there are great
14 benefits for improvements that can be
15 feasibly achieved by the City.

16 In 2010, working with me,
17 Econsult and Independence Institute for
18 Urban Research, we documented the costs
19 imposed by vacant properties on the City.
20 The costs today are at least as large as
21 those documented in that report. The
22 maintenance costs that the City endures
23 for vacant properties totals over \$20
24 million per year, and although the City
25 controls only a fraction of vacant parcels

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2 within the City, it has to bear
3 significant cost to maintain them all,
4 including such as waste clean-up, pest
5 control, police and fire calls.

6 In addition to maintenance
7 costs, the City fails to collect over \$2
8 million in property taxes each year on
9 vacant properties, with 17,000 vacant
10 parcels that are tax delinquent, most by
11 over a decade, more than \$70 million is
12 owed to the City and School District in
13 back property taxes. That number
14 increases about \$2 million every year.

15 Vacant parcels have a large
16 blighting effect on the neighborhoods,
17 which significantly lowers property
18 values in the neighborhoods. The lower
19 property values reduce the City's
20 property tax collections and especially
21 with the new Actual Value Initiative. We
22 estimate that the 40,000 vacant parcels
23 in the City cost homeowners about 6.5
24 percent of property value for a citywide
25 aggregate loss of \$3.6 billion in

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property value. For the average household, this magnitude is about \$8,000.

The \$3.6 billion loss in property values directly translates into lost revenue for the City. Based on the property tax rate of 1.34 percent, this translates into a loss in tax revenue of \$48 million annually.

Together, direct maintenance costs of 20 million, delinquent taxes of 2, and lost property tax revenue due to a lower base totals an annual loss of \$70 million. These are revenues that could be used for schools, recreation or tax reform. While \$70 million in annual loss to the City and \$3.6 billion in private wealth losses are very large numbers; in fact, underestimate the total public and private cost of underused vacant property. It seldom recognized that the underused properties result in a vicious cycle of disinvestment and decline in affordable housing. Vacant properties

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2 are like a giant banner that says it's
3 not a good idea to invest in this
4 neighborhood.

5 And by investors, I don't only
6 mean developers and speculators.
7 Homeowners continually have to decide how
8 much to reinvest in their properties.
9 Should I fix the roof? Should I improve
10 the kitchen? Is it worthwhile to apply a
11 fresh coat of paint? Do I make
12 improvements to the exterior, my yard, my
13 sidewalk?

14 COUNCILMAN HENON: Mr. Voith,
15 if you could wrap up your testimony.

16 MR. VOITH: Okay.

17 Properties that don't have
18 reinvestment deteriorate and eventually
19 become abandoned, and it's a big
20 potential threat to affordable housing in
21 the community.

22 Over time, we estimate that the
23 loss in property value associated with
24 vacant properties results in a reduction
25 in population of about six and a half

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2 percent as well. If we were to get the
3 growth every year, that's 29,000
4 properties that will come to be developed
5 in the City. If we just took that over a
6 50-year period, we would see 580
7 additional units per year, which would
8 generate an increase in City tax revenues
9 from property, sales, wage, and business
10 taxes by \$5.5 million every year. It
11 would grow by 5.5 million every year. So
12 that after five years, they get \$25
13 million.

14 So in summary, the costs are
15 large. The benefits are large. It's a
16 great opportunity.

17 Thank you very much for the
18 opportunity to present.

19 COUNCILMAN HENON: Thank you
20 very much for your testimony.

21 (Applause.)

22 COUNCILMAN HENON: Mr. Kromer,
23 you may proceed with a summarized
24 testimony.

25 MR. KROMER: Good afternoon.

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2 I'm John Kromer. I really appreciate the
3 opportunity to testify today. I've
4 submitted written testimony and just want
5 to enter some comments on the record
6 regarding a proposal that I want to put
7 forward. This is not the solution to all
8 our problems and it has not been tested
9 and studied carefully, but I think this
10 is a good time to introduce new ideas,
11 not only about why a Land Bank is needed
12 but also about the question of how would
13 it work.

14 As you know, there are really
15 two kinds of vacant and blighted
16 properties: properties that people want
17 and properties that nobody wants. And
18 whether it's fair or not, the City has to
19 deal with the properties that no one
20 wants as well as those properties that
21 people do want that are in great demand.
22 And we've learned a few things about
23 properties that nobody wants. One is
24 that properties that no one wanted a few
25 years ago have become extremely valuable

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2 now. It wasn't that long ago that most
3 people would have not thought that Point
4 Breeze was an area where you could sell
5 vacant properties for significant amount
6 of money. Things have changed.

7 We also know through the
8 studies that have been completed of the
9 experience of the Pennsylvania
10 Horticultural Society in greening vacant
11 lots that improving vacant lots increases
12 surrounding property values, and that's
13 very important, but we've also found out
14 through the PHS experience that it costs
15 money. So I think a fundamental question
16 that's going to have to be addressed
17 going forward, where do we get the money
18 to pay for maintaining those properties,
19 many of which are already in public
20 ownership, that nobody wants right now.

21 You're aware that one of the
22 important powers of the Land Bank
23 authority is to take properties from the
24 Sheriff Sale process without having to
25 bid against other participants in the tax

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2 auction. This power, it's been
3 suggested, could be used to take
4 properties and convey them to responsible
5 developers or hold them for site
6 assemblage.

7 I also want to suggest that
8 there may be an opportunity to consider
9 taking properties from the Sheriff Sale
10 process and reselling them at auction
11 with a surcharge added, and using the
12 proceeds of that surcharge to fund
13 property maintenance costs for those
14 properties that no one wants.

15 In my testimony I've attached
16 two exhibits related to the September
17 Sheriff Sale last month, and if you look
18 at Page 3, you'll see that nearly all the
19 properties that were sold were sold at
20 well under 50 percent of the assessed
21 value as determined by the Office of
22 Property Assessment. I'm not suggesting
23 that you could sell these properties at
24 the full value that they've been assessed
25 for or necessarily am I assuming that the

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2 values assigned by OPA are accurate,
3 maybe they're too high. But I've got a
4 feeling that a number of these properties
5 could have been sold with an additional
6 surcharge attached at settlement. Most
7 of these properties were sold for under
8 30 percent of the assessed value.

9 So the approach that I'm
10 suggesting be considered further is one
11 in which the Land Bank on the date of
12 Sheriff Sale would buy all of the
13 properties that are listed, hold those
14 properties for which a developer is
15 available, and then through the existing
16 mechanism at the same location, with the
17 same staff, sell the rest, charge a 15
18 percent surcharge at closing and use the
19 proceeds to create a reserve fund that
20 would fund property maintenance.

21 Thank you.

22 COUNCILMAN HENON: Thank you
23 all for your testimony.

24 Clerk, could you read the next
25 panel.

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2 THE CLERK: Pastor Rachel
3 Sensenig, Pastor Harris, and Matt Subits.
4 The panel following this panel will be
5 Majeedah Rashid, Jamie G, and Adam Lang.
6 If you could step inside the rail please
7 also. Thank you.

8 (Witnesses approached witness
9 table.)

10 COUNCILMAN HENON: I want to
11 thank you for appearing here. Again, I
12 want to remind you if you could keep your
13 testimony within three minutes, and if
14 you do have written testimony, if it
15 hasn't been submitted for the record,
16 please provide it to the Clerk so we can
17 get your full testimony on the record.

18 So you may proceed with your
19 testimony. Thank you.

20 PASTOR SENSENIG: Thank you.
21 My name is Rachel Sensenig. I'm a Pastor
22 with Circle of Hope Church here in this
23 great city. I studied at Temple, and
24 I've been a homeowner for 15 years and
25 I'm the proud parent of two kids in the

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2 Philadelphia School District.

3 Circle of Hope is a church of
4 more than 800 upstanding citizens who
5 represent almost every neighborhood in
6 Philadelphia, and we've been on the front
7 lines of urban agriculture for the past
8 decade. We care about the earth, because
9 Jesus leads us to peace with God and
10 peace with each other and with creation.

11 Urban farming is a direct
12 restorative response to blight, poverty,
13 violence, illness, and other health
14 problems that plague our underresourced
15 neighborhoods. Let me tell you how
16 personal it is for me.

17 There's a huge vacant lot right
18 next to my house that attracts garbage,
19 stray animals, and drug activity. My
20 children play right next to this space
21 every day, and although we maintain our
22 yard and garden on it, it's been a battle
23 to protect the neighborhood kids from the
24 danger right next door. The vacant land
25 is a breeding ground for mosquitos,

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2 trash, squatting, and drug-related
3 violence. If this Land Bank bill is
4 passed as is, we'll have the support we
5 need to turn this blight into fresh food
6 for the neighborhood.

7 Currently, we've been stalled
8 by the labyrinth and legal process, and
9 it's a wasted opportunity. Our
10 neighborhood remains dangerous.

11 I'm not the only Philadelphian
12 who lives next to wasted vacant property
13 that poses a threat to the health and
14 peace of their community. That's why
15 Circle of Hope knows how important it is
16 to resurrect dead and forgotten space in
17 the City and make it life-giving for its
18 neighbors. We've been able to grow and
19 share healthy food, harvest rainwater,
20 repurpose salvaged materials, and clean
21 up litter lots to reveal the beauty of
22 our city. These gardens and safe green
23 spaces have become centers of life,
24 community, and education on Hicks Street
25 in South Philly, Frankford Ave in

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2 Kensington, Penn Street in Germantown,
3 and at 5th and Diamond in North Philly.

4 The transformation in each of these
5 neighborhoods is a result of the
6 inclusive partnerships, education, and
7 support networks that we've helped to
8 develop among community members.

9 We cannot ignore the benefits
10 of fresh food production and open green
11 space in our neighborhoods.
12 Philadelphia's community and squatter
13 gardens produced \$4.9 million worth of
14 vegetables in the summer of 2008, and
15 that number is much higher now. Families
16 who participate in community gardening
17 can lower their produce bills by 30 to 40
18 percent. And the benefits don't stop
19 with food production. Studies show that
20 just a 10 percent increase in nearby
21 green space decreases a person's health
22 complaints as if they were five years
23 younger. And it's not just physical. I
24 don't have time to get into it now, but
25 the psychological benefits associated

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2 with connection to green space, things
3 that are alive and growing, are well
4 documented now.

5 That's why the Land Bank
6 matters. It's fair. All people need
7 connection to healthy food and safe green
8 space. The Land Bank bill inspires
9 neighbors to restore the land around
10 them. The bill provides accountability
11 through community representation and
12 transparency through its commitment to
13 assess the bank's impact on a yearly
14 basis.

15 The time is now for a fair,
16 transparent, and accountable process to
17 put blighted lots and buildings back to
18 use for and by communities. Please vote
19 yes on this bill to create a Land Bank we
20 can trust.

21 COUNCILMAN HENON: Thank you
22 for your testimony.

23 (Applause.)

24 COUNCILMAN HENON: Please state
25 your name for the record and proceed with

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2 your summarized testimony, please.

3 PASTOR HARRIS: My name is
4 Richard Harris and I've been a resident
5 in Philadelphia since I was 11 years old.
6 I'm a husband to my wife, Ruthie, of 31
7 years, a father to our three children,
8 and I'm here today as a representative of
9 the Firm Hope Baptist Church in the Port
10 Richmond and Kensington section of
11 Philadelphia, which has been a fixture in
12 the community since 1924. I've been a
13 member there for more than 20 years. In
14 the last five years, I've served as
15 Senior Pastor. And the members of our
16 church and our families, our communities,
17 and our friends in the Port Richmond and
18 Kensington section are in desperate need
19 of a Land Bank that's accountable and
20 that's fair.

21 I came to Port Richmond in
22 1988, and in 1980, I joined Firm Hope
23 Baptist Church, and even then, it was a
24 blighted community. And today right
25 within the perimeters of Lehigh Avenue to

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2 Clearfield Street, to Kensington Avenue
3 and Aramingo Avenue alone, there are
4 nearly 29 football fields worth of vacant
5 lots and abandoned buildings. And over
6 the years I've seen so many residents
7 grow desensitized to the garbage, to the
8 crime, to the overall deterioration that
9 these lots have invited into our
10 communities. And unfortunately Sunday
11 mornings I've personally had to minister
12 to those who struggle to keep hope alive
13 because of decays of broken promises for
14 development and investment within our
15 neighborhoods. And also one in four of
16 the vacant lots within the Port Richmond
17 and Kensington area is tax delinquent or
18 often owned by speculators and
19 individuals who live outside of the City
20 that do not and will not reinvest in our
21 neighborhoods. And this has frustrated
22 many of us in communities all over the
23 City of Philadelphia, and for so long and
24 for so many years, we felt like there was
25 no solution in sight. But now we have

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2 this Land Bank bill, which will help to
3 efficiently take land back from
4 irresponsible owners and release them to
5 good and equitable developers, community
6 groups, faith-based groups, churches all
7 over the City and help to build
8 affordable, sustainable communities
9 within our city. And, most importantly,
10 the bill as written will now give all
11 communities in Philadelphia a renewed and
12 a much-needed voice in their
13 neighborhoods with community
14 representative presence and active on the
15 boards and establish accountabilities
16 that are so vital to the success of the
17 Land Bank as well as the progress of our
18 city.

19 So we're asking each of you to
20 exercise a power that you have to vote
21 the Land Bank as is out of committee
22 today so City Council can pass this bill
23 before the end of the year. And also, we
24 believe that the time is now.

25 (Applause.)

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2 PASTOR HARRIS: We believe with
3 all of our hearts that the time is now
4 for a fair and a transparent and
5 accountable process to put blighted lots
6 and buildings back to use for and by
7 communities.

8 So, again, we're asking that
9 each of you will vote this bill to create
10 a Land Bank that not only those of us
11 that are here today but all the residents
12 of Philadelphia can trust.

13 Thank you very much.

14 COUNCILMAN HENON: Thank you
15 for your testimony.

16 (Applause.)

17 COUNCILMAN HENON: Please state
18 your name for the record and proceed with
19 a summarized testimony, please. Thank
20 you.

21 MR. SUBITS: Thank you. How
22 y'all doing? Matthew Subits, homeowner
23 in South Philadelphia, 1500 block of
24 Porter. I work for United Communities.
25 I'm their urban farmer educator. That's

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2 at 8th and Snyder, for anyone that does
3 not know. I run the farms on the 700
4 block of Mercy and Emily with public
5 school students, mostly high school, but
6 I also work with elementary school
7 students. I work with about 75 a year.
8 So not too many, but it's a nice section
9 of students.

10 The importance of having land
11 for them to go into in a quiet space
12 that's not like the hustle and bustle of
13 the City is very important. A lot of
14 them don't leave South Philadelphia, so
15 to be able to get that in their
16 neighborhood is great.

17 They work there over the
18 summer. So to have students employed
19 over the summer is very important,
20 especially in South Philadelphia when it
21 starts to get hot. And the biggest thing
22 is that they build pride for their
23 community, and pride in students is then
24 pride for the future. So that just helps
25 create more positive education spaces as

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2 long as we have the land to do it. So I
3 believe this bill would help that along.

4 There are a lot of vacant lots
5 around my farm as well. I would love to
6 expand in them officially. I do grow on
7 them now, but it would be nice to have it
8 not taken away at some point. So I look
9 forward to you all passing this through.

10 I appreciate your time. Thank
11 you.

12 What's up, Squilla.

13 (Applause.)

14 COUNCILMAN HENON: Thank you
15 all for your testimony. Thank you for
16 your testimony.

17 Clerk, can you read the next
18 panel, please.

19 THE CLERK: Majeedah Rashid,
20 Angel Rodriguez, Jamie G, and Adam Lang.
21 The panel following this panel will be
22 Narayan Sharma, Glenn Bergman, and Stan
23 Shapiro. So if you could also step
24 inside the rail. Thank you.

25 (Witnesses approached witness

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2 table.)

3 MS. RASHID: Good morning,
4 everyone. My name is Majeedah Rashid and
5 I'm the Chief Operating Officer of the
6 Nicetown CDC, and we are members of the
7 Philadelphia Association of CDCs. I want
8 to thank City Council for allowing me the
9 opportunity to testify today.

10 For the past five years, the
11 Nicetown CDC has been contracted by the
12 City's Community LandCare Program to
13 maintain more than 200 vacant lots
14 throughout the Nicetown and the Northwest
15 section of the City. The primary concept
16 of the LandCare Program is to stabilize
17 and maintain vacant lots for future
18 development.

19 In 2009, the Nicetown CDC
20 acquired vacant land from the City in the
21 4300 block of Germantown Avenue that
22 later became our first major development,
23 Nicetown Court. The \$14.9 million LIHTC
24 development was completed in December of
25 2011 yielding 37 affordable rental units

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2 and Temple Physicians as the anchor
3 tenant utilizing half of nearly 4,000
4 square feet of commercial space. The
5 project was the catalyst to
6 revitalization on Nicetown's corridor and
7 leveraged Nicetown Court II, a \$19
8 million LIHTC project located directly
9 across the street from the historic Wayne
10 Junction train station. It yields 50
11 town home apartments and 5,000 square
12 feet of commercial space. The Nicetown
13 Court I and II sites were previously huge
14 parcels of City-owned land that stood
15 vacant for more than 20 years on
16 Germantown Avenue. Like other vacant
17 lots, they attracted drugs, violence, and
18 other criminal activity and were often
19 littered with trash and other short
20 dumping, a part of the \$20 million in
21 City costs incurred for maintenance of
22 vacant properties.

23 The Nicetown CDC realized that
24 the City's system for transferring
25 ownership was broken when we often had to

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2 navigate four different sale processes
3 from public agencies and then get a
4 resolution through City Council to take
5 ownership of vacant parcels and put them
6 back into productive use. This process
7 can take many years, and a perfect
8 example of this is the space under and
9 around Roosevelt Boulevard that crosses
10 Nicetown's commercial corridor.
11 Ownership includes the PRA, Public
12 Property, Department of Recreation, and
13 even easement rights from PennDOT. In
14 2005, one of our first corridor planning
15 efforts included a concept of a skate/BMX
16 park under the Boulevard, which became
17 very popular and was well supported by
18 the community. When the City found out
19 about our concept, they liked it so much
20 that it was included in the Green 2015
21 plan. The potential of the project
22 included innovative recreation, lighting,
23 public art, economic and entrepreneurial
24 opportunity, a vendor's bazaar, and a
25 stormwater management plan. Not to

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2 mention it would put acres of
3 underutilized, blighted, and neglected
4 space to use with multi-faceted benefit
5 to the community and the City.

6 The Nicetown CDC's Corridor
7 Cleaning Team has significantly improved
8 the unsafe and blighted conditions of the
9 underpass, and today it is used by
10 vendors and flea markets on a regular
11 basis. We have new interest from major
12 potential funders who want to help us
13 design and develop the site, but we still
14 do not really know who owns what and how
15 long it will take to assemble this
16 massive tract of vacant land in order to
17 make such a promising project a reality.

18 Reforming this system now is
19 critical to ensure that the City does not
20 stand in the way of economic
21 redevelopment at a time when people want
22 to invest in Nicetown and other areas of
23 the City.

24 Other examples of this include
25 a nearly two-acre open green space to the

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2 rear of the Nicetown CDC Community Center
3 and Steel Elementary School. The City
4 has never been able to tell us exactly
5 who owns these parcels of land, School
6 District, RDA, Public Property, et
7 cetera. Meanwhile, we have worked with
8 the community, local schools and
9 universities, youth organizations, and
10 community groups to establish it as a
11 community garden. While there is still a
12 great deal of work that needs to be done
13 and without ownership, we have been
14 feeding the hungry with produce harvested
15 from our garden for the past five years.
16 Our plan is to expand to an urban farm or
17 farmers' market that provides fresh
18 fruits and vegetables while also creating
19 employment and educational opportunities.

20 The Nicetown CDC's neighborhood
21 economic plan includes development of
22 scattered sites for affordable housing.
23 Hundreds of vacant lots and structures in
24 Nicetown and surrounding neighborhoods
25 could be put back into productive use by

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2 the CDC, other developers, community
3 groups, and businesses if we didn't have
4 to navigate through four different sales
5 processes from public agencies and then
6 wait for a resolution through City
7 Council to take ownership.

8 The fact is --

9 COUNCILMAN HENON: Excuse me,
10 ma'am, if you could wrap it up, if you
11 can summarize the remaining part of your
12 testimony, please.

13 MS. RASHID: The fact is the
14 City just does not move quickly enough to
15 move public or privately owned abandoned
16 and tax-delinquent parcels into the hands
17 of responsible owners.

18 The current Land Bank
19 ordinances before Council are the results
20 of months of negotiation and compromise
21 between diverse stakeholders and ensure
22 that all parties involved in the sale of
23 City-owned property are held to an
24 efficient and predictable timeline.

25 We are the investors in

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2 affordable housing that give our
3 low-income Philadelphians stable, safe
4 places to live. We are the investors in
5 green space that give Philadelphians a
6 better quality of life and opportunities
7 to grow healthy food. We are the
8 investors in market-rate developments
9 that attract investors and funders to
10 spend their dollars here and contribute
11 to the tax base.

12 On behalf of the Nicetown CDC,
13 our community partners, and the
14 coalitions working together with PACDC, I
15 urge you to fix this system now so we can
16 all productively continue working our
17 plans to invest in Philadelphia's future.

18 COUNCILMAN HENON: Thank you
19 for your testimony.

20 (Applause.)

21 COUNCILMAN HENON: Sir, if you
22 may, state your name for the testimony
23 and please summarize your written
24 testimony.

25 MR. RODRIGUEZ: Good afternoon,

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2 Councilmembers. My name is Angel
3 Rodriguez. I'm the Vice President of
4 Community and Economic Development for
5 Asociacion Puertorriquenos en Marcha.
6 I'm submitted written testimony, so I'll
7 keep this brief.

8 For those of you that don't
9 know, APM is a non-profit that provides
10 health and human services and provides
11 physical development throughout North
12 Philadelphia. The boundaries for North
13 Philadelphia that we service, we're
14 bounded by Temple University, American
15 Street industrial corridor, York Street,
16 and Cecil B. Avenue. This corresponds
17 generally to census tracts 155, 156, and
18 162.

19 But in stark contrast to Temple
20 University, the community that we service
21 suffers from much blight. We have a lot
22 of vacant land and numerous unsafe
23 structures in the area that we provide
24 housing development.

25 The building stock there is

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2 characterized by two- and three-story row
3 houses with gaps between them created by
4 demolished structures. The buildings are
5 generally in fair to poor condition and
6 many with signs of deferred maintenance,
7 such as old windows, doors, roofs. In
8 general, these buildings are inefficient
9 by modern standards and too expensive to
10 operate.

11 APM, to remedy this situation
12 over the past 26 years, has developed 150
13 units of homeownership, with no defaults,
14 and 300 rental units. But yet despite
15 that, APM and other developers' efforts
16 to acquire vacant properties are still
17 held in abeyance. It takes too long to
18 assemble properties. Even though with an
19 organization like ourselves, we have a
20 lot of history and experience in getting
21 properties redeveloped, it takes us two
22 to three years to actually acquire land.

23 In Philadelphia, an estimated
24 40,000 vacant parcels exist, 10,000 of
25 which are publicly owned. Estimated

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2 18,000 parcels are privately owned and
3 are tax delinquent. Vacant lots attract
4 drugs, violence, and other crimes and are
5 often littered with garbage. This is an
6 issue that we end up having to fundraise
7 and provide social services to remedy as
8 well for our neighbors and residents.

9 The City spends \$20 million
10 each year in police, fire, and
11 maintenance costs associated with vacant
12 properties. It's nearly \$55,000 per day
13 every day to remedy this issue.

14 We hope that the City Council
15 will pass this legislation so that we can
16 have a streamlined process and a process
17 that will process clear title, transfer
18 properties to responsible owners, and
19 acquire tax-delinquent properties without
20 risking their sale to speculators.

21 A lot of our residents have
22 been longtime residents and longtime
23 citizens of Philadelphia and have paid
24 their taxes. It's unfair to see them
25 priced out of their area and their

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2 neighborhoods.

3 So the Land Bank we believe is
4 a best practice that more than 75
5 governments have adopted, including
6 Cleveland, Louisville, Atlanta, and
7 Genesee County in Michigan.

8 In closing --

9 COUNCILMAN HENON: If you'd
10 like to summarize. Thank you.

11 MR. RODRIGUEZ: -- we'd like to
12 see the City Council pass this Land Bank
13 legislation, make sure it's predictable,
14 consistent, transparent, accountable, and
15 equitable.

16 Thank you.

17 COUNCILMAN HENON: Thank you
18 for your testimony.

19 (Applause.)

20 COUNCILMAN HENON: State your
21 name for the record and summarize your
22 testimony, please.

23 MS. GAUTHIER: Jamie Gauthier.
24 Hello, and thank you for the opportunity
25 to testify today. I am the Executive

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2 Director of the Sustainable Business

3 Network of Greater Philadelphia. We are

4 a membership organization for locally

5 owned businesses that are socially and

6 environmentally responsible. The

7 majority of our 400-plus members are

8 small businesses, many of which are

9 located in the City of Philadelphia.

10 SBN is a member of the Philly
11 Land Bank Alliance, and I'm here today to
12 advocate for the creation of a Land Bank
13 that will spur an effective and efficient
14 and fair property acquisition and
15 development process within our city. And
16 I'm advocating for that because it's good
17 for our city's small businesses.

18 Proximity to vacant, blighted
19 land hurts small businesses. Vacant
20 properties deter customers from visiting,
21 lower property values, and stop vibrant,
22 contributing businesses from locating
23 nearby. Additionally, our businesses
24 have reported an inability or difficulty
25 to purchase vacant land for business

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2 expansion, and that makes business growth
3 in the City of Philadelphia very
4 difficult.

5 During our talks with our
6 businesses, the owners have frequently
7 pointed out the negative impacts of
8 vacant properties and land that are
9 adjacent or nearby to their businesses.
10 In just one example, one of our business
11 owners was negotiating with the RDA for
12 several months to buy the abandoned
13 property behind his business. While the
14 owner was trying to complete the
15 transaction, the land was sold at Sheriff
16 Sale for \$5,000 to a speculator, who then
17 proceeded to not develop the property and
18 to hold onto it, waiting for its value to
19 increase.

20 Here is what our businesses
21 have told us that they want with regards
22 to the process for purchasing vacant
23 property:

24 They want the process to be
25 simple and clear, with a searchable,

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2 accurate inventory and a single
3 acquisition process. They want the
4 process to be predictable with set
5 pricing in a standard contract. They
6 want the process to be timely, and they
7 want a deadline for the City to accept or
8 reject their offer. They want the
9 process to be transparent, with a clear
10 definition of a qualified buyer and a
11 written acquisition process. And they
12 want the process to be objective.

13 It is SBN's stance that the
14 legislation that was put forward in March
15 2013 was really positive, and it was the
16 result of months of negotiation and
17 compromise between a diverse set of
18 stakeholders, of which we were one. We
19 find the recent amendment to that bill
20 troubling, though, and we think that the
21 recent amendments will have, or proposed
22 amendments rather, will have a negative
23 impact on the creation of a successful
24 Land Bank.

25 In closing, I just want to

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2 remind Council that 98 percent of the
3 businesses here are small businesses with
4 fewer than 50 employees. These
5 businesses create over half of the jobs
6 in the City and they're the backbone of
7 our economy. If we don't have a clear
8 and efficient process for acquiring and
9 developing vacant land and properties, it
10 proposes -- it will have a negative
11 impact on these businesses' ability to
12 expand and be successful.

13 And so I urge City Council
14 today to reconsider the proposed harmful
15 amendments to Bill No. 10157 [sic] and to
16 adopt it as is or to continue discussions
17 towards workable solutions with the
18 Philly Land Bank Alliance and others.

19 Thank you very much.

20 COUNCILMAN HENON: Thank you so
21 much for your testimony.

22 (Applause.)

23 COUNCILMAN HENON: Clerk, can
24 you read the next panel, please.

25 Oh, I'm sorry.

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2 MR. LANG: My name is Adam
3 Lang. I am the Chairman of the
4 Republican City Committee Policy
5 Committee. I did submit written
6 testimony, so I will actually summarize
7 what I handed in.

8 COUNCILMAN HENON: I appreciate
9 that. Thank you.

10 MR. LANG: I want to just
11 reiterate something that someone said
12 earlier, that there are really two types
13 of property in Philadelphia involving the
14 Land Bank issue: property people want
15 and property that's a problem. I think
16 the Land Bank, if this does go forward,
17 should really have the significant focus
18 of dealing with the property that is a
19 problem and not the property that people
20 want. In that regard, there's two points
21 I sort of want to point out with the
22 legislation that I think the Committee
23 should think about.

24 First is involving the tax
25 sales and auctions. It would be

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2 preferable if the Land Bank received land
3 that no one picked up at auction, so as a
4 natural filter of what people do want and
5 what they don't want. If they want it,
6 they're bidding on it, they're accepting
7 it. If they don't, they're not bidding.
8 It's now an issue that something the Land
9 Bank can address.

10 The second issue is about land
11 that once it gets to Land Bank. One of
12 the current problems with the current
13 setup with the multiple agencies is, land
14 gets in there and then it never comes
15 out. Something to consider also then for
16 the Land Bank would be an expiration on
17 properties that if there's no activity on
18 a piece of property after a certain
19 period of time, whether you determine
20 it's a year, three years, five years, et
21 cetera, it sort of automatically gets
22 dumped back out to a public auction, so
23 that way to sort of guarantee that
24 there's actual opportunities for the
25 public to move on that land and it just

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2 doesn't get stuck in sort of a black
3 hole.

4 Like I said, the testimony is a
5 bit more in detail, but that's the
6 summary of what I've submitted.

7 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Thank
8 you.

9 MR. LANG: Thank you.

10 COUNCILMAN HENON: Thank you
11 for your testimony.

12 Clerk, would you read the next
13 panel, please.

14 THE CLERK: The next panel,
15 Narayan Sharma, Glenn Bergman, and Stan
16 Shapiro. The panel following this panel
17 will be Tiffany Green and Teresa
18 McCormick. So if Ms. Green and Ms.
19 McCormick can step inside the rail and
20 have a seat, that would be great.

21 COUNCILMAN HENON: And, again,
22 I thank you all for your patience with
23 the testimony and hearing me upon each
24 one of you prior to giving your
25 testimony. Courtesy and respect for

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2 others who still have yet to testify,
3 please could you summarize your
4 testimony. We have several, and I mean
5 several, panels still who have not been
6 heard.

7 So thank you. State your name
8 for the record and please proceed with
9 your testimony.

10 MS. READING: My name is Annie
11 Reading. I'm filling in for Narayan
12 Sharma. He is a Philadelphia refugee who
13 was going to testify but got sick at the
14 last minute.

15 So I work on the Refugee
16 Resettlement Team at HIAS Pennsylvania.
17 We resettle about 150 refugees in
18 Philadelphia every year, and the City as
19 a whole receives closer to 800 refugees
20 each year. We're testifying in support
21 of the Land Bank bill.

22 The vast majority of refugees
23 in Philadelphia are coming from farming
24 backgrounds. In many cities across the
25 U.S., urban refugee gardens have proven

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2 to be astoundingly successful in easing
3 refugees adaptation to life in the U.S.

4 About a year ago, HIAS began
5 working with a group of Bhutanese
6 refugees in the Northeast to discuss
7 establishing a community garden for them
8 there. With the assistance of HIAS, this
9 group spent last winter and spring trying
10 to find a piece of land where they could
11 get the rights to start this garden.
12 It's been almost a year now and these
13 refugees still haven't found access to a
14 plot of land to garden.

15 Likewise, there's an amazing
16 refugee garden that currently exists in
17 South Philly, but there are around 100
18 families on the wait list for that garden
19 and it will be years before refugees
20 arriving now are able to start gardening
21 there. And there are no other community
22 gardens or accessible vacant lots that
23 have the space for more in that area.

24 Many, many refugees want to be
25 gardening in Philly, but due to land

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2 access difficulties under the current
3 system, this opportunity hasn't been
4 available to many. Barriers to gardening
5 for Philadelphia refugees mark several
6 serious missed opportunities. It's a
7 missed health opportunity. Many refugees
8 here rely mainly on canned and processed
9 foods because of the cost of buying fresh
10 produce and because they're unable to
11 grow it themselves. Refugees in the U.S.
12 begin to develop diabetes and heart
13 disease in astounding numbers. Americans
14 aren't great role models. And these are
15 problems these ethnicities rarely, if
16 ever, had before.

17 Second, inaccess to gardening
18 is a missed mental health opportunity.
19 Countless refugee gardens in cities
20 across the country have proven gardening
21 to be an incredible bridge for refugees
22 between their past culture and new
23 lifestyle.

24 And, finally, it's a missed
25 community integration opportunity. The

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2 same refugee gardens around the country
3 have proven gardening to be an amazing
4 way to heighten visibility and awareness
5 for refugees and a way for them to meet
6 and interact with their new communities
7 as positive assets to those communities.

8 I can't say enough about what
9 more gardening opportunities would do for
10 Philadelphia refugees as well as their
11 receiving neighborhoods. And I can
12 attest to the fact that it's not
13 happening anymore is entirely a land
14 access issue.

15 Thank you.

16 (Applause.)

17 COUNCILMAN HENON: Thank you
18 for your testimony.

19 State your name for the record
20 and proceed with your testimony.

21 MR. BERGMAN: Glenn Berman.

22 Good morning, Chairman, members of the
23 Committee, and City Council. My name is
24 Glenn Bergman. I'm the General Manager
25 of Weavers Way Co-Op and I am testifying

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2 today on behalf of the Co-Op and in my
3 capacity as an appointed member of the
4 Mayor's Food Policy Advisory Council.

5 Through Greenworks Philadelphia
6 and the Philadelphia Food Charter, the
7 City of Philadelphia sets targets to
8 create more equitable access to healthy
9 foods in neighborhoods, improve the
10 environment and public health, and
11 stimulate the economy by increasing
12 access to local, fresh, and healthy
13 foods.

14 Urban agriculture, which
15 includes community gardening and market
16 of community-supported farming, is
17 integral to improving food access,
18 creating economic opportunity,
19 responsibly using land, and stabilizing
20 property values. We can create a
21 solution to our vacant land problem that
22 also triggers solutions to these other
23 pressing needs by supporting the Land
24 Bank, the bill that has been submitted.

25 Weavers Way Co-Op is a

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2 not-for-profit business with 155 staff
3 members who are also owners of the
4 business, along with more than 5,000
5 community families. The Co-Op had sales
6 of over \$18 million and projected for 19
7 million this year. Weavers Way also has
8 a non-profit that today provides
9 nutrition and urban farming education
10 programs in partnership with many of the
11 organizations that were here today,
12 including the Saul School, Awbury
13 Arboretum, the Pennsylvania Horticultural
14 Society.

15 We operate four stores, three
16 farms, including a small farm at the
17 Stenton Family Manor, an emergency
18 homeless shelter in Mount Airy that
19 houses 200 family members.

20 Weavers Way attempted to
21 purchase land from the Philadelphia
22 Redevelopment Authority six years ago.
23 The process was difficult. We sat with
24 representatives from the PRA, but no one
25 could really help us, and we never heard

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2 back. The land was technically available
3 for sale, but it was difficult to
4 determine its status or figure out how to
5 obtain it. So we turned to Awbury, where
6 we rent two acres of land. We turned to
7 Saul and Fairmount Park, and we now rent
8 three acres of land from the City.

9 Today, Weavers Way is the largest farming
10 entity in the City, producing over
11 \$140,000 worth of vegetables and selling
12 product in the City at Head House Square
13 Farmers' Market on Sunday, to our two
14 stores, to over 100 members of the CSA at
15 Saul, and as of last month, we started
16 selling produce into the cafeteria at
17 Saul School.

18 Urban farming can easily
19 provide 10 to 20 percent increase in
20 income for working people. Urban farming
21 can save families money on their food
22 budget. Urban gardens and farming also
23 will increase community interaction and
24 reduce crime.

25 Our city needs a Land Bank, a

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2 government agency laser-focused on
3 getting land into the hands of caring
4 neighbors, community groups, and
5 non-profit organizations, as well as
6 developers and for-profit businesses such
7 as cooperatives. We believe that there
8 have to be four points to this bill:

9 Public land for public
10 benefit - the Land Bank's mission and
11 policies need to ensure land is used for
12 community gardens and farms, affordable
13 and accessible housing, and neighborhood
14 businesses such as a co-op.

15 Community involvement in
16 decision-making - community residents
17 should have a voice in the future of
18 their neighborhoods through public
19 hearings on Land Bank regulations, the
20 Land Bank planning process, and
21 knowledgeable expertise on the Board.

22 Transparency and access to
23 information - residents, community
24 groups, and developers should be able to
25 find out easily what land has been sold,

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2 to whom, for what price, and for what
3 intended use. This will help restore the
4 trust of community residents who have
5 tried for years to gain legal access to
6 vacant parcels. Additionally, there
7 should be adequate notice, at least 15
8 days, of upcoming sales posted on sites.

9 And, lastly, accountability -
10 the Land Bank should publish an annual
11 impact statement and a corrective action
12 plan if its target goals have not been
13 met.

14 The appointed members of the
15 Food Policy Council and Weavers Way
16 support a Land Bank that is able to
17 accomplish these goals.

18 We thank you for your time, and
19 we're there to support you on this
20 effort.

21 COUNCILMAN HENON: Thank you
22 for your testimony.

23 (Applause.)

24 COUNCILMAN HENON: Please
25 proceed with your summarized testimony.

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2 Thank you.

3 MR. SHAPIRO: Good morning,
4 Chairman Henon and members of the
5 Committee. My name is Stan Shapiro and
6 I'm Vice Chair of Neighborhood Networks.
7 Neighborhood Networks is a progressive
8 advocacy organization whose members live
9 in every section of Philadelphia. Many
10 of us have encounters every day with
11 vacant and abandoned properties that
12 plague our city. However, many of our
13 members live in more affluent sections of
14 Philadelphia such as Chestnut Hill, West
15 Mount Airy, Fairmount, and Center City.
16 Those members too, even if not directly
17 in regular eyesight of blight, know that
18 their quality of life is at risk if the
19 scourge of abandonment is not corrected.
20 And all of our members recognize that
21 widespread blight can only be remedied if
22 the people in the neighborhoods directly
23 affected have a voice in the fate of the
24 land they live on.

25 Neighborhood Networks' central

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2 core philosophy is that none of us
3 prosper unless we all have a route to
4 prosperity. Fifty-one percent of the
5 households in the City have incomes under
6 \$35,000 a year, more than half, and their
7 plight will not be cured by business as
8 usual. We do not agree with the
9 narrative that if we only turn as much
10 land as possible over to the one percent,
11 induce them to develop it with tax
12 abatements, TIFs, and KOZs, the benefits
13 will trickle down. That philosophy will
14 not produce the 57,000 units of
15 affordable housing that the people of
16 this city so desperately need.

17 We think the job of City
18 government is to level the playing field
19 so that every person or group who has a
20 legitimate idea of how to use available
21 land to benefit communities in need
22 should have a real shot at acquiring it.
23 That's why we support Bill 130156 and its
24 provisions that let everyone know what
25 land the City owns, requires community

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2 review before it's sold, and allows it to
3 be sold at a nominal price when helpful
4 to neighborhoods in stress. That's the
5 key element here, that neighborhoods in
6 stress can get this property at prices
7 that it can afford to make it available
8 to those who really need it.

9 The time is now for a fair,
10 transparent, and accountable process to
11 put blighted lots and buildings back to
12 use for and by communities. Vote yes on
13 this bill to create a Land Bank we can
14 trust.

15 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Thank
16 you.

17 (Applause.)

18 COUNCILMAN HENON: Thank you
19 all for your testimony.

20 Clerk, could you read the next
21 panel, please.

22 THE CLERK: Tiffany Green,
23 Teresa McCormick, and if Mark Harris
24 could also approach the witness table.
25 The group following this group will be

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2 Beth Miller, Dwayne Wharton, Andrew
3 Sharp, and Emaleigh Doley, if you could
4 step inside the rail and take a seat.

5 (Witnesses approached witness
6 table.)

7 MS. GREEN: Good morning.
8 Tiffany Green, Concerned Citizens of
9 Point Breeze.

10 I want to speak to this bill
11 because I think that the concept is very
12 good, but I think we need to look at the
13 process in terms of how the Board is
14 going to be set up. We have serious
15 concerns on how the Board will be set up
16 regarding the approval -- the appointment
17 by five members by the Mayor. Usually
18 when the Mayor appoints, usually those
19 particular members carry out that
20 particular policy of the Mayor and,
21 therefore, it is not necessarily
22 independent thinking or independent
23 action at that point. We also have a
24 problem about the appointment process,
25 and where does the community apply to be

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2 a part of this process?

3 What we are proposing is that
4 you set up a vacant land property
5 subcommittee in each community according
6 to the NAC like -- not the NAC, but the
7 way the NAC is set up where each area has
8 their own NAC or we can create maybe some
9 extra sections where you have the
10 subcommittee. This way it gives power
11 back to the community to oversee the
12 vacant lots, because each community
13 should be able to decide how they want
14 those properties built in their own
15 community. Everyone does not want urban
16 farms. I mean, I know it's a good idea
17 and it sounds good, but urban farms
18 during the wintertime look really bad and
19 raggedy and they leave them sitting there
20 during the wintertime. During the
21 summertime, it needs to be specific setup
22 in terms of urban farm. You need to have
23 like a greenhouse type of thing, because
24 at night, people throw stuff over there
25 to those food, whether it could be urine

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2 or poison or what, and then they want to
3 turn around and give it out to the
4 community. That's not right.

5 It needs to be some more things
6 added in, and we -- and the block needs
7 to decide if they want an urban farm,
8 because urban farms bring rodents and
9 mice running up and down the street,
10 additional insects where kids are riding
11 up and down with their bicycles. So
12 everybody doesn't want that.

13 But, more importantly, if we
14 set up the subcommittee, it will be
15 similar like the NAC Advisory Committee
16 where you run for the Board, you run for
17 the committee. It's one year servicing,
18 one year where you stay on it and you
19 serve and you give your input as to what
20 is happening. Because let us not be
21 naive. This is about cheap properties
22 coming up on the listing and that many
23 developers want to get hold of a cheap
24 property. Right now you have 2213 that
25 is selling for \$625,000. If that was a

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2 City-owned property, if you get a
3 property for \$50,000 and you sell the
4 property for 625,000, that's quite an
5 investment property. So why wouldn't
6 developers want to go for City-owned
7 property. I think that that needs to be
8 localized and that the community needs to
9 have more of an input.

10 The other thing I want to say
11 is at this particular point, I think that
12 the Vacant Property Review Committee
13 needs to also take more of a look. Once
14 the property is sold, it needs to come
15 through the RCOs and zoning. It can't
16 get a by-right because they purchased it
17 from the City. It needs to come through
18 the RCOs, go through zoning process, and
19 the community still should vote if they
20 want that particular property developed
21 the same way it should be developed.

22 So I think -- and also I want
23 to say we've been an RCO since November.
24 We never received any notification about
25 any meetings regarding this particular

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2 vacant lot process or meetings regarding
3 that. From our understanding, everything
4 came through the CDC, and CDCs are
5 developers in concept. So we feel there
6 should be more grassroots, and we could
7 have been notified through the RCO
8 process.

9 Thank you very much on that.

10 COUNCILMAN HENON: Thank you
11 for your testimony.

12 (Applause.)

13 COUNCILMAN HENON: Please state
14 your name for the record and proceed with
15 your testimony.

16 MS. McCORMICK: My name is
17 Teresa McCormick and I'm with Concerned
18 Citizens of Point Breeze. I am a
19 longtime resident of the Point Breeze
20 area.

21 As you know, in the Point
22 Breeze area, our area has changed
23 drastically. We feel as though that the
24 land banking process is not enough
25 community representation. Residents who

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2 maintain these lots or try to clean these
3 lots and try to purchase these lots are
4 denied and are given to the developers or
5 to organizations. We ask that the
6 residents receive first preference to
7 buying these properties. If they have
8 maintained it or if they live next door
9 to it or in back of it, those residents
10 should have the opportunity to buy those
11 properties for five to two thousand
12 dollars.

13 If the applicant sells the
14 property within the 10 to 15 years, a
15 percentage, again a percentage, of that
16 sale should go to the schools here in the
17 Philadelphia area. Also, residents also
18 should obtain that land.

19 Also, community farms must be
20 petitioned by the block for approval.
21 Also, a reminder, please, within this
22 bill, we feel as though that -- we like
23 the bill, but it's not enough community
24 representation and it's giving more,
25 again, to developers and non-profits.

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2 Thank you.

3 (Applause.)

4 COUNCILMAN HENON: Thank you
5 for your testimony.

6 Sir, state your name for the
7 record and, again, you just handed out
8 your testimony, which is multiple pages.
9 So if you could summarize that, we'll
10 make sure it's submitted for the record.
11 Thank you.

12 MR. HARRIS: My name is Mark
13 Frog Harris. I'm President of Cathedral
14 Park Association. As just indicated, my
15 prepared remarks are excessively long for
16 the three minutes I'm limited to, so I'm
17 going to attempt to hit the highlights.

18 My focus here is on the
19 deficiencies in the bill, and I realize
20 many people recognize many problems with
21 it.

22 One of the whereases mentions
23 side and rear yards as uses. Of course,
24 we all recognize this happens, but we
25 need to remember that many times these

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2 become dead areas, vehicle parking areas
3 of waste land without economic or
4 societal value. So we need to keep that
5 in proper proportion.

6 As mentioned by many people,
7 the community needs to be involved.

8 Whereas No. 7 emphasizes
9 socioeconomic diversity within
10 neighborhoods. This is presented to us
11 as a given, something we should accept.
12 I think it needs to be questioned.
13 Within a given neighborhood in many cases
14 people want stability. They want
15 consistency. Otherwise, it would have an
16 adverse impact on their home or their
17 value investment. They really don't want
18 something greatly different next to their
19 home. So we need to be careful about
20 that again.

21 Section 1 implies the
22 Councilpersons will have no say in this
23 process. I think this is going too far.
24 Most of us expect our Councilpersons to
25 try to assist us, and they should have

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2 some ability to do so. Perhaps not as
3 much as it has been in the past.

4 Six months to provide for
5 formation of the Board of Directors. But
6 there's no moratorium associated for a
7 stay of new property transfers in the
8 interim, which means things may continue
9 as they are. I think there should be a
10 moratorium immediately irregardless of
11 the progress of this bill.

12 Monthly meetings are provided
13 for, but it does not mention times.
14 These times might be during the business
15 day when many people are not available
16 and would prevent community members to
17 participate. So I would suggest that
18 they should be required to be held in the
19 evening.

20 There's no preferences or
21 priorities for property use that are
22 clearly expressed here. There's an
23 assumption regarding properties that this
24 will be with regards to the future.
25 Whereas, in fact, many properties have

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2 been transferred in the past and in many
3 cases people have taken side yards and
4 they don't use them for gardens as they
5 promised to or lands are abandoned.

6 There needs to be provisions to reach
7 back, to reclaim properties so they can
8 use -- better use than they have been
9 when they have been given.

10 There's also an assumption here
11 and it's explicitly stated in points that
12 the Land Bank will only deal with surplus
13 properties. There may be other
14 properties which are not categorized as
15 surplus which should properly be in the
16 purview of such a Land Bank and it should
17 be permitted to do so.

18 There's a statement here in
19 15-509 that the property transfers from
20 the agencies should be done as quickly as
21 possible. This may not always be
22 desirable. There should be a provision
23 to allow delays in transferred properties
24 and an ability to effect this in the
25 future when it's desired.

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2 Also when properties are
3 transferred, an obligation to maintain it
4 occurs. What happens when RA or somebody
5 transfers property and they no longer
6 want to maintain it and this Land Bank
7 does not have funds to maintain it? The
8 funding must transfer with the property
9 or there must be a way to sever it.

10 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE:

11 Mr. Harris, if you can wrap up, please.
12 We have your written statement, so it
13 will be made part of the record.

14 MR. HARRIS: There needs to be
15 clarification about this Vacant Property
16 Review Committee. The way it has been
17 defined here and the way it would need to
18 be going forward need to be different,
19 because it's not been effectual, I think
20 all of us would agree. If it's going to
21 do a better job in the future, that's not
22 going to happen simply by putting it
23 under the supervision of a new Board of
24 Directors. It's going to have to be
25 recomposed. Otherwise, we're going to

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2 get the same results we've been having in
3 the past.

4 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Okay.

5 Thank you, sir. Thank you very much.

6 (Applause.)

7 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE:

8 Mr. Creelman, the next group, please.

9 THE CLERK: Beth Miller, Dwayne
10 Wharton, and Andrew Sharp, also with
11 Emaleigh Doley. The group following this
12 group will be our last panel of the day.
13 That's Ellen Kaplan, Amy Miller, Judith
14 Robinson, and Dawn Graham, if you could
15 step inside the rails and have a seat.

16 (Witnesses approached witness
17 table.)

18 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Thank
19 you.

20 Whoever would like to start,
21 please proceed.

22 MS. MILLER: Good afternoon,
23 and thank you for the opportunity to
24 testify. My name is Beth Miller. I am
25 the Executive Director of the Community

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2 Design Collaborative. The Collaborative
3 is a non-profit community design center.
4 We strengthen neighborhoods through
5 design by providing preliminary design
6 services to community-based non-profits.
7 Through our service grants, we help
8 groups with big ideas but little money.
9 Our organization is pleased to be a
10 member of the Land Bank Alliance. Since
11 1991, we've worked side by side with
12 community development groups across the
13 City that have successfully transformed
14 underutilized properties and vacant land.
15 More than half our service grants address
16 this topic.

17 As you well know, urban
18 development is no easy task. In our
19 experience, active and engaged
20 communities that provide stewardship and
21 tenacity while achieving their goals are
22 the linchpin of revitalized
23 neighborhoods.

24 The City has been a key partner
25 in developing and implementing

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2 comprehensive neighborhood plans to
3 promote community revitalization, but
4 more often than not, the groups we work
5 with face hurdles around land acquisition
6 even when the land is owned by public
7 agencies. The City can do better, and
8 the non-profits we work with deserve
9 better.

10 To illustrate how the current
11 system isn't working, I'm going to tell
12 you a quick story. The story is of a
13 resourceful faith-based community and
14 economic development group and its
15 ten-year quest to acquire and redevelop
16 one acre of vacant land.

17 In the late '80s, the
18 organization relocated to a church
19 surrounded by vacant lots. They were
20 good neighbors. They cleared the lots
21 surrounding the parcel of debris and soon
22 began their quest to acquire two adjacent
23 vacant lots.

24 First, they worked to develop
25 ownership of the parcels, and despite

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2 incomplete City records, found that two
3 public agencies are possible owners.

4 About five years into the search, the
5 group came to us for a service grant to
6 explore their concept for reuse.

7 Eventually ownership among the City
8 agencies was sorted out and two
9 properties were awarded listed by
10 address. But when the group finally
11 received the land transfer, they got an
12 unexpected surprise. Final documents
13 contained a description for only one
14 property. Imagine that, after ten years
15 of hard work, only one.

16 Despite the significant
17 setback, the group moved forward,
18 redesigning the project to adjust for the
19 missing parcel. They created more than
20 50 units of senior housing that are
21 affordable, innovative, and green.

22 A horror story to some perhaps,
23 but honestly for us, it's a success
24 story. The stewardship and tenacity of
25 this dedicated non-profit transformed

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2 publicly owned vacant lots into
3 much-needed equitable development.

4 Those who work tirelessly to
5 transform blight into opportunity deserve
6 better. The City can do better. A Land
7 Bank is our best hope for creating a
8 predictable, efficient, transparent, and
9 accountable public process for the
10 acquisition and disposition of vacant
11 property.

12 In closing, I'd like to thank
13 the Committee for its support of creating
14 a Land Bank, and I urge you to move this
15 legislation forward for full Council
16 consideration.

17 Thank you.

18 COUNCILMAN HENON: Thank you
19 for your testimony.

20 (Applause.)

21 COUNCILMAN HENON: State your
22 name for the record and please submit
23 your full testimony and summarize your
24 testimony.

25 MR. SHARP: I will keep it

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2 brief, Councilman Henon.

3 COUNCILMAN HENON: Thank you.

4 MR. SHARP: Good afternoon. My
5 name is Andrew Sharp and I'm Director of
6 Outreach for PennFuture, the lead group
7 behind the Next Greet City initiative.
8 PennFuture works to create a just future
9 where nature, community, and economies
10 thrive. We're a proud member of the Land
11 Bank Alliance and strongly support the
12 creation of a Land Bank to put vacant,
13 blighted properties back to productive
14 reuse, including community gardens, side
15 yards, and other green space.

16 What we know: The City's
17 property transfer system is broken.
18 Fragmented ownership among four agencies,
19 complicated, unclear rules for sale, and
20 the need for multiple agencies and
21 politicians to sign off on even routine
22 transfers make it enormously difficult
23 for businesses and residents to acquire
24 property. We have an opportunity to fix
25 that today.

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2 The Land Bank bill before us
3 creates a predictable, transparent,
4 accountable process to move properties
5 back to productive reuse. It
6 acknowledges Council's role while
7 ensuring that these decisions are made
8 early in the development process. Any
9 changes to this bill must maintain this
10 predictable and consistent timeframe and
11 must balance the interest for market-rate
12 development, green space, and community
13 benefit.

14 With over 40,000 vacant
15 properties citywide, Philadelphia needs a
16 Land Bank to move properties back into
17 the hands of responsible new caretakers.
18 We have an opportunity to create lasting
19 change and overhaul the way our city
20 deals with vacant, blighted property.
21 But it's essential that we create a Land
22 Bank that works, one that functions
23 efficiently and effectively and supports
24 a range of potential reuses, including
25 urban agriculture, community gardens,

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2 side yards, and other green space.

3 Thank you.

4 (Applause.)

5 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Thank

6 you.

7 Sir.

8 MR. WHARTON: Good afternoon.

9 Thank you. My name is Dwayne Wharton.

10 I'm the Director of External Affairs with

11 The Food Trust. It's a

12 Philadelphia-based non-profit with the

13 mission to ensure that everyone has

14 access to affordable, nutritious food,

15 and information to make healthy

16 decisions. I'd like to thank

17 Councilwoman Sanchez for her leadership,

18 members of Council for having us here

19 today, and all of our partners who have

20 lended their voices to this important

21 issue.

22 When The Food Trust started

23 about 20 years ago, there were

24 neighborhoods throughout Philadelphia

25 where residents couldn't easily buy

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2 healthy foods like fruits and vegetables,
3 and research shows us that people who
4 live in these areas are more at risk for
5 serious health and debilitating diseases
6 like obesity, hypertension, and diabetes.

7 The Food Trust has worked with
8 neighbors, schools, grocers, farmers, and
9 policymakers in Philadelphia and across
10 the country to change how we all think
11 about healthy food and to increase its
12 availability. Together, we brought
13 supermarkets to communities that have
14 gone decades without one. We've helped
15 corner store owners introduce fresh
16 produce, low-fat dairy, whole grains.
17 We've taken soda and junk foods out of
18 our schools and even City Hall, and we've
19 taught students to appreciate foods like
20 apples and cherry tomatoes.

21 We're particularly proud to be
22 a partner in all of this with the
23 Philadelphia Department of Health.
24 Through the Get Healthy Philly
25 initiative, we help Philadelphians make

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2 the healthy choice the easy choice.

3 For many of our citizens,
4 especially people living in low-income
5 communities of color, finding a fresh
6 apple or cherry tomato was still not easy
7 and, as a result, health issues related
8 to poor diet are still prevalent
9 throughout our city. Although we are
10 starting to see obesity rates in children
11 decline, our city is far from a healthy
12 one. Full-service grocery stores,
13 farmers markets and other vendors that
14 sell fruits and vegetables and other
15 healthy foods still cannot be found in
16 many of our neighborhoods.

17 When we talk to grocers and
18 fresh food retailers in Philadelphia and
19 across the nation about why they don't
20 operate in some areas, there are a host
21 of issues that come up that include lack
22 of financing, increased costs of
23 construction and operating stores in
24 certain communities, government
25 bureaucracy, and lack of suitable land

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2 parcels. We routinely encourage city
3 governments across the country to provide
4 assistance with land assembly and
5 fast-track permitting for supermarkets
6 and other healthy food retail projects
7 that want to locate in underserved areas.

8 We at The Food Trust believe
9 that a Land Bank can help create spaces
10 for gardens, farms, farmers' markets, and
11 fresh food retail that will improve the
12 lives and the health of Philadelphia
13 residents. Just like the City of
14 Philadelphia is helping to make the
15 healthy choice the easy choice, a
16 predictable, transparent, efficient, and
17 accountable Land Bank process will help
18 make the choice to develop and operate a
19 healthy enterprise in these underserved
20 areas an easy choice as well.

21 Thank you.

22 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Thank
23 you. Thank you very much.

24 (Applause.)

25 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Ma'am,

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2 please state your name for the record and
3 proceed, please.

4 MS. DOLEY: My name is Emaleigh
5 Doley and I'm a member of the Steering
6 Committee for the Design Advocacy --

7 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Speak a
8 little bit more in the microphone.

9 MS. DOLEY: I'll just start
10 over.

11 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: That's
12 all right. We heard you, but go ahead.

13 MS. DOLEY: I am Emaleigh
14 Doley. I'm a member of the Steering
15 Committee for the Design Advocacy Group,
16 which is also known as DAG. I am also a
17 block captain in Germantown where I was
18 born and raised.

19 The Design Advocacy Group is an
20 organization that provides an independent
21 and informed public voice for design
22 quality in architecture and planning for
23 the Philadelphia region. We believe in
24 the power of good design, but our city
25 cannot design around vacancy, and that is

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2 why we urge you to vote this bill today
3 out of the committee so we can move
4 forward together to get vacant properties
5 back into productive use by creating of
6 the Land Bank.

7 To put this into a real-life
8 context, I live in Germantown, as I said,
9 on the unit block of West Rockland
10 Street, which is located in Councilwoman
11 Bass's 8th District. My block alone has
12 six vacant lots, four of which are
13 privately owned and have been tax
14 delinquent since the 1980s, since I was a
15 kid. I'm now 30. The City of
16 Philadelphia and the Philadelphia Housing
17 Authority own the final two. So that's a
18 pretty big mixture of ownership that we
19 have here. And within our current
20 system, there is no clear way to navigate
21 dealing with these properties. What are
22 the chances that they'll ever be
23 redeveloped under our current system?

24 This bill sets policy that will
25 be real, immediate, and useful to

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2 individuals and organizations that want
3 to build and restore buildings. It's a
4 solid policy. It's predictable and it's
5 consistent, and it's not subject to
6 change as our elected officials come and
7 go.

8 The bill does not change the
9 role of Council, but we hope for some
10 changes to the old business as usual. We
11 are counting on each of you to share your
12 vision for vacant properties in your
13 districts and to encourage those private
14 and non-profit applicants who are ready
15 to invest in our great city. The more
16 transparent and predictable process will
17 bring the kind of neighborhood
18 rehabilitation that we all seek. And I
19 speak to that on behalf of the Design
20 Advocacy Group but also, as I said, as a
21 lifelong resident of Germantown where
22 change is greatly needed.

23 So please vote today to move
24 forward to create a Land Bank for
25 Philadelphia.

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2 Thank you.

3 (Applause.)

4 COUNCILMAN HENON: Thank you so
5 much for your testimony.

6 Clerk, could you read the next
7 panel, please.

8 THE CLERK: The last panel is
9 Ellen Kaplan, Amy Miller, Judith
10 Robinson, and Dawn Graham.

11 (Witnesses approached witness
12 table.)

13 MS. GRAHAM: Hello. I'm Dawn
14 Graham and I represent a proposed
15 not-for-profit called Wenurturies.
16 Wenurturies is a proposed not-for-profit
17 dedicated to creating sustainable social
18 economic opportunities through what we
19 call urban agribusiness.

20 Who or what is Wenurturies? We
21 nurture trees, growth. We are
22 Philadelphians, and we nurture the idea
23 that vacant lots can be transformed into
24 revenue-producing agents by providing
25 healthy food choices, employment, and

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2 education.

3 The Philadelphia Land Bank bill
4 will help us to plan to use designated
5 vacant lots in West Philadelphia, 19104
6 and 19131, as a pilot for developing
7 urban agribusiness. And that speaks to
8 the point 16-510(3)(a).

9 We are ready now to launch a
10 mobile fresh produce facility that will
11 feature locally sourced produce year
12 round, and its proceeds will assist in
13 the development of projects that involve
14 land development for healthy green spaces
15 in Philadelphia.

16 What do you think? How would
17 you answer? Would you like to see plant
18 and tree nurseries instead of vacant
19 lots? Would you like to shop once a
20 month in your neighborhood in
21 Philadelphia where you can get fresh
22 produce even during the winter? Would
23 you eat fresh foods grown in your
24 neighborhood gardens?

25 We're using these answers, so

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2 we encourage you to please reply, because
3 we're using these answers to
4 strategically plan how we can meet the
5 challenges and the opportunities of urban
6 agribusiness.

7 It is clear that where there is
8 a lack of employment, underemployment,
9 and other challenges in not having enough
10 money, hunger becomes another issue. A
11 report published by the Food and
12 Agriculture Organization, the
13 International Fund for Agricultural
14 Development, and the World Food Program
15 stated that one out of eight people in
16 the world suffer from hunger. In
17 Philadelphia, we have many neighbors and
18 neighborhood communities that are
19 included in that number of persons
20 suffering from hunger. Without having
21 enough to eat or not having healthy food
22 choices available, many are not prepared
23 to learn in school or gain viable
24 employment.

25 However, countries, not just

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2 neighborhoods, have embraced the idea of
3 improving agriculture, even areas
4 affected by lack of water, having made
5 social economic improvements.

6 Philadelphians can greatly benefit also
7 if organizations like Wenurturies can use
8 the Philadelphia Land Bank bill and its
9 facility to allocate vacant lots for
10 agribusiness.

11 You may believe that urban
12 agribusiness in Philadelphia cannot work
13 for vacant lots. Vacant lots in
14 Philadelphia have value that have become
15 a burden because City revenues must be
16 used to maintain useless parcels. Or you
17 may see it more advantageous to leave the
18 lots for commercial or industrial
19 opportunities as it will drive revenue.
20 NPR's Bill Chappell noted and made a
21 comment by one of the three agencies that
22 released the hunger report that policies
23 aimed at enhancing agricultural
24 productivity and increasing food
25 availability, especially where small

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2 holders are targeted, can achieve hunger
3 reduction when poverty is widespread.

4 We want not only to support the
5 Philadelphia Land Bank bill, but we want
6 our policies for the accomplishment of
7 our mission to be adopted to support the
8 benefits of providing healthy food
9 choices to many Philadelphia neighbors.
10 He also noted that when they are --

11 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: If we
12 could ask you to wrap the testimony up,
13 please.

14 MS. GRAHAM: When they are
15 combined with social protection and other
16 measures that increase the income of poor
17 families, they can even have a more
18 positive effect and spur rural
19 development by creating vibrant markets,
20 employment opportunities, resulting in
21 equitable economic growth.

22 So we ask you to join with us,
23 Wenurturies, and all of our neighbors and
24 all of our partners and the Council and
25 panel members and the Chairman in

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2 supporting the passing of the
3 Philadelphia Land Bank bill with this
4 amendment.

5 Thank you.

6 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Thank
7 you. Thank you very much.

8 (Applause.)

9 MS. MILLER: Good afternoon,
10 members of City Council. Thank you for
11 your patience this afternoon and hearing
12 everyone's testimony. My name is Amy
13 Miller. I am an elected officer of the
14 East Kensington Neighbors Association.
15 I've also been an active representative
16 in the Healthy Foods Green Spaces
17 Coalition since its origin in the
18 advocacy surrounding the community
19 gardens in the zoning bill revision.

20 In general, I do support this
21 Land Bank bill. Although I do have some
22 very specific recommendations for
23 changes. I am greatly encouraged by the
24 consideration of community gardens and
25 green spaces in this bill. This bill

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2 acknowledges the positive impacts that
3 these spaces have and recognizes the role
4 in community development.

5 This bill allows for the
6 nominal or reduced price disposition of
7 property for urban agriculture and
8 community open spaces.

9 Gardens and green spaces are
10 public assets, not income-producing
11 commercial enterprises in general, and so
12 they deserve nominal disposition in order
13 to be held in trust for the community for
14 the future.

15 In the bill's section on
16 disposition of properties, it describes
17 the process of public notification and
18 opportunity to comments. In a prior
19 version of this bill, public notice was
20 to be at 30 days. However, in the
21 current version, it is down to just 15
22 days. This is really too short a
23 timeline and should be reverted back to
24 the 30 days notice, and it should be
25 specified that registered community

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2 organizations, or RCOs, receive notice at
3 least 30 days prior to any final action.

4 Most RCOs operate on a monthly
5 calendar, and so having at least 30 days
6 notice is only appropriate in order to
7 ensure adequate notification to the
8 community regarding dispositions of the
9 land in their neighborhoods at monthly
10 meetings.

11 This bill describes a strategic
12 plan that will be developed to guide the
13 acquisition and disposition of property
14 by the Land Bank. However, the nature of
15 community involvement in the strategic
16 planning process is not acknowledged.
17 There needs to be public meetings and
18 other methods of meaningful civic
19 engagement and outreach to inform the
20 strategic plan. The RCOs for those
21 neighborhoods need to be involved in that
22 strategic planning process. It can't be
23 done behind closed doors by City
24 Administration alone.

25 Many specific policies and

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2 procedures for the Land Bank disposition
3 are not described in this bill, although
4 those were very crucial to the fairness
5 of the new system. For instance, how are
6 multiple requests for the same property
7 to be dealt with? Will requests be dealt
8 with on a first-come, first-served basis
9 or will multiple requests be evaluated
10 and prioritized?

11 For many community gardens and
12 green spaces, the desired owner may not
13 be immediately known or able to make a
14 request to the Land Bank. Philadelphia
15 Parks and Recreation, the Neighborhood
16 Gardens Association or even a local
17 community group or land trust may be an
18 intended owner of a green space or
19 garden, but the process for one of those
20 groups to be able to be ready, willing,
21 and able to request property from the
22 Land Bank may take some time, and in the
23 meantime, a developer may request that
24 same property. What will the disposition
25 be so we can accommodate community

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2 concerns and desires for the lands in
3 order to protect gardens and green spaces
4 from being bulldozed?

5 To conclude, although there is
6 so much promise in this Land Bank bill as
7 it relates to consideration of community
8 gardens and open spaces, more is needed
9 to ensure that the voice of the community
10 is heard. Public notice, including to
11 RCOs, should be at least 30 days. The
12 development of a strategic plan should
13 involve the community through meaningful
14 outreach and engagement, and existing
15 community gardens and green spaces should
16 be respected in the disposition process,
17 especially where real estate market
18 demand is high.

19 I thank you for your time and
20 consideration, and I welcome any
21 questions.

22 Thank you.

23 COUNCILMAN HENON: Thank you
24 for your testimony.

25 (Applause.)

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2 COUNCILMAN HENON: State your
3 name for the record.

4 MS. KAPLAN: Thank you. Good
5 afternoon. I'm Ellen Mattleman Kaplan.
6 I'm the Vice President and Policy
7 Director of the Committee of Seventy.

8 Many people, including a number
9 of members of this Council, have worked
10 very hard and for many, many years to put
11 this Land Bank proposal on this
12 Committee's agenda, and there are many
13 positive aspects of this bill. But it's
14 not going to be the last word. Clearly,
15 there are going to be amendments, whether
16 they happen here, whether they happen on
17 the floor of Council, but what the
18 Committee of Seventy is urging you to do
19 is to send the strongest possible message
20 that you want this Land Bank to work, and
21 you can do this by not allowing
22 councilmanic prerogative to render it
23 impotent.

24 For too many instances,
25 councilmanic prerogative is this city's

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2 version of gridlock. And it's not
3 transparent, it's not predictable, it's
4 not equitable, it's not consistent. All
5 the things that people in this room have
6 been talking about today that a Land Bank
7 should be, councilmanic prerogative is
8 not.

9 Now, the Committee of Seventy
10 is not naive enough to think that it's
11 going to go away, but the question is how
12 can councilmanic prerogative be exercised
13 on the front end in a way that is
14 appropriate so that one District
15 Councilperson is not permitted to torpedo
16 the disposition of land or vacant schools
17 or anything that the Council has been
18 working very hard to achieve because of
19 one person.

20 So we would ask you when you
21 are amending this bill and you're going
22 to send it to the floor of City Council,
23 please do not put councilmanic
24 prerogative on the tail end of this Land
25 Bank proposal.

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2 Thank you.

3 COUNCILMAN HENON: Thank you
4 for your testimony.

5 (Applause.)

6 COUNCILMAN HENON: Clerk, are
7 there any other panels?

8 Is there anyone here who wishes
9 to testify on this bill?

10 (No response.)

11 COUNCILMAN HENON: Okay. With
12 that being said, we are going to go into
13 a brief recess. We'll be back soon.
14 Thank you.

15 (Short recess.)

16 COUNCILMAN HENON: Good
17 afternoon, everybody. I want to
18 conclude -- that concludes our public
19 hearing and we will now enter into our
20 public meeting.

21 The Chair recognizes
22 Councilwoman Maria Quinones-Sanchez.

23 COUNCILWOMAN SANCHEZ: Thank
24 you, Mr. Chair. I know it's been a long
25 morning, afternoon, and I promise we are

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2 not going to do this through the evening.

3 Before I go through the
4 specifics of the amendment, I want to
5 thank again the leadership of the Council
6 Chair -- the Public Property Chair
7 through this. Today what we saw was a
8 historic coalition of private, public
9 stakeholders, especially grassroots
10 residents, all who agree this is an
11 important toolbox that we must have in
12 the creation of this Land Bank, all who
13 agree that the current resources are not
14 enough in what we do as it relates to
15 vacant land and blight.

16 We all agree that the current
17 structure that we have does not leverage
18 our resources adequately. We agree that
19 we must be strategic and plan for how we
20 use our limited resources in dealing with
21 this and in the implementation of this
22 Land Bank. We agree that we do need
23 additional resources, both short term and
24 long term, but that those resources are
25 not necessarily those resources that are

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2 on the table but in how we grow our tax
3 base as a result of using this new tool.

4 We agree that we have an
5 unrealized \$3.6 billion value in our
6 vacant land and that vacant land and
7 properties diminish property values on
8 every single block in every single
9 neighborhood. And we agree that there's
10 still a lot of work to be done in how
11 this gets operationalized.

12 As Council, I think we agree
13 that this bill, which I am going to ask
14 this Committee to move out of committee,
15 will not get final approval until there
16 are several assurances that have been
17 highlighted today in the discussion,
18 assurances about the employees, many who
19 have not had a raise for the last ten
20 years, and we ensure that they are
21 treated fairly and they are protected.
22 Assurances that as we develop the budget
23 for 2015, that this Council is committed
24 to providing the resources so that we can
25 have an efficient and effective Land

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2 Bank.

3 Some of the answers that we
4 need we will not have today, but I am
5 committed to working with the Committee
6 Chair and the work group that we had
7 established previously in how we
8 operationalize this with the
9 Administration. The items that have been
10 highlighted are the budget request, the
11 strategic planning, the operationalizing
12 it, the leadership, and the governance.

13 And so many people have thought
14 we couldn't get through zoning, the
15 zoning reform, many people thought we
16 couldn't get through AVI, and at some
17 point today, many of us thought we
18 couldn't get through this hearing, but I
19 want to thank the Chair for his
20 leadership and due diligence and making
21 sure that all of these answers -- all of
22 these questions be answered by final
23 approval and definitely as we prepare our
24 budget.

25 The amendments that are before

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2 the Committee today are based -- some of
3 them are technical in nature. They're
4 Law Department recommendations about its
5 relationship with the Vacant Property
6 Review Committee. Some of it is on the
7 Board composition, the leadership issues
8 that we discussed. There is a summary
9 that has been circulated along with the
10 amendment. Most of them are technical in
11 nature and around the notice of the
12 bills. All of these amendments preserve
13 all the key aspects of the bill dealing
14 with pricing, policy, strategic planning,
15 and Council disposition approval. And it
16 includes -- it continues -- these
17 amendments continue to emphasize the need
18 for the strategic plan and the impact
19 statements and performance reports as
20 requested by some of my Council
21 colleagues.

22 So with that, Mr. Chair, as one
23 of the bill sponsors, I ask that this
24 Committee approve this and that I
25 continue to be committed to work through

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2 all of the issues that I have outlined.

3 Thank you, Mr. Chair.

4 COUNCILMAN HENON: Thank you,
5 Councilwoman.

6 The Chair recognizes Councilman
7 Bill Green for a motion on the
8 amendments.

9 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Thank you,
10 Mr. Chairman. I move that the amendments
11 to Bill No. 130156 that have been
12 circulated to this Committee be approved.

13 (Duly seconded.)

14 COUNCILMAN HENON: It has been
15 moved and seconded.

16 All those in favor?

17 (Aye.)

18 COUNCILMAN HENON: Nays?

19 The ayes have it.

20 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Nay.

21 COUNCILMAN HENON: Let the
22 record be recorded that Councilwoman
23 Blackwell has voted nay on the
24 amendments.

25 The ayes have it and the

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2 amendments have been adopted.

3 Now the Chair recognizes
4 Councilman Greenlee for the motion of
5 Bill No. 130156, as amended.

6 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Thank
7 you, Mr. Chairman. I move that Bill No.
8 130156, as amended, be reported out of
9 this committee with a favorable
10 recommendation.

11 (Duly seconded.)

12 COUNCILMAN HENON: It has been
13 moved and seconded.

14 All those in favor?

15 (Aye.)

16 COUNCILMAN HENON: The ayes
17 have it. Nays?

18 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Nay.

19 COUNCILMAN HENON: Let the
20 record reflect that Councilwoman
21 Blackwell voted nay.

22 The Committee has voted in the
23 affirmative on aye. The ayes have it.
24 Bill No. 130156, as amended, will be
25 reported out of committee with a

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2 favorable recommendation.

3 This concludes our public
4 meeting. Thank you all for coming.

5 (Committee on Public Property
6 and Public Works concluded at 2:05 p.m.)

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CERTIFICATE

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

MICHELE L. MURPHY
RPR-Notary Public

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