COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA

COMMITTEE ON LEGISLATIVE OVERSIGHT

Independence Visitor's Center
599 Market Street
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19106
Monday, November 18, 2024
1:10 p.m.

PRESENT:

COUNCILMAN ISAIAH THOMAS, CHAIR
COUNCILWOMAN RUE LANDAU, VICE-CHAIR
COUNCILWOMAN QUETCY M. LOZADA
COUNCILMAN JEFFREY YOUNG, JR.

RESOLUTION: 240701

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COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Good afternoon. I want to take a moment to thank everybody for being here, first on foremost. But officially, I want to say welcome, good afternoon. Welcome to the City Council hearing of the Committee on Legislative Oversight. I note that the hour has come and we are ready to start today's hearing. Today is Monday, November 18, 2024.

And I will ask, Mr. Maynard, will you please call the roll to take attendance. Members that are present, please say aye.

THE CLERK: Vice-Chair Landau.

(No response.)

THE CLERK: Councilmember Lozada.

COUNCILWOMAN LOZADA: Present.

THE CLERK:

Councilmember Young.

COUNCILMAN YOUNG:

Present.

THE CLERK: And, Chair Thomas.

COUNCILMAN THOMAS:

Present.

THE CLERK: We do not have a quorum, but one is not necessary to chair this meeting. I turn it over to you.

COUNCILMAN THOMAS:

Thank you, Mr. Clerk.

We are a little pressed for time as it relates to some of the people that we have here to testify. So now that we've taken attendance, I want to take a moment to again thank you all for being here.

But I do want to take a moment of personal privilege to recognize and I'll recognize other

people are here, but I want to start by asking our Congressman, Congressman Brendan Boyle to come on up and allow him to be on the first panel to testify today because he has a short window.

Congressman Boyle. Thank you for being here today, sir.

(Applause.)

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Congressman, of course you know how this goes but I have to say it for the record. Please state your name for the record and you may begin with your testimony.

CONGRESSMAN BOYLE: Well, thank you very -- thank you very much. Can you hear me okay? Testing one, two, three. Now, we're good. Oh, how is this?

Well, thank you very much. I am Congressman Brendan Boyle. Proud to represent the best

city in the world in Congress, the City of Philadelphia, member from the 2nd Congressional District in Pennsylvania, which includes where we are right now.

I want to thank you and applaud your leadership, Councilman Thomas, also my good friend Councilwoman Lozada and nice to have the opportunity to formally meet Councilman -- Councilman Young. Also, please pass along my greetings to all of the members of City Council who of course serve us so well.

This is a special time and a special room to me. As the folks at Independence Visitor Center know, it was in this very room just several months ago I hosted more than 40 colleagues who served in their countries parliament from all around the world, UK, France, Germany,

Belgium, et cetera, constituting the 31 other nations that comprise NATO.

I happen to serve in the body called the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, and I brought my colleagues here to Philadelphia for several days of our sessions literally overlooking one of the most inspiring vistas I think anywhere in the United States, Independence Mall.

And I can tell you how moved they were, not just from our sessions and the great vista here. But then when we did a tour of Independence Hall, many of the things that were at stake there, 248 years ago, are very much still at stake today, within our own land within each one of those other 31 NATO countries and indeed all throughout the world.

Now, I am hoping, and

I've said this as someone while I've been in Congress for 10 years now, I've only represented the Historic District the last 18 months or so. It was a nice aspect of the latest round of redistricting that grew this area into my Congressional district.

Since that time, we've been quite busy in my office, knowing that July 4, 2026 is just around the corner. So we have been able to achieve several things. First, in just the last year alone I'm proud to say along with working with my colleague and good friend Dwight Evans, we were able to secure just over $3 million this year to local nonprofits in this area for all sorts of projects.

That does not include -- that's by the way through the Community Project Funding Grant program. That does not include

other money that we are currently fighting for in the next fiscal year and the year after to deliver the Independence National Historic Park.

I've been working with more than 20 nonprofits all in and around this area to try to drive more resources, whether federal, state, local or independent such as foundation grants and others. I believe that we should be and will be the epicenter of our nation's Semiquincentennial.

One of the aspects about getting the Historic District into my Congressional means that I need to be able to say effortlessly the word Semiquincentennial, so the first achievement has been made. But really more than anything, I believe that the Fourth of July 2026 can be the epicenter of this nation coming together when the

eyes of not only the nation and the world will be right here upon us and also at a time when we know there is great divide internally within the United States, but also within our world.

So with that in mind, it is why that I with a bipartisan group of members of Congress have introduced legislation that I actually announced a few months ago right on the beautiful balcony that many of you were just on and it is a piece of legislation that would, for only the third time in our nation's history, see a session of Congress held again at Independence Hall.

When I say only the third time, of course I mean the third time since Virginia and Maryland stole our nation capital from Philadelphia and brought it to D.C. into 1800. The two previous

times that Congress has met outside of Washington, D.C. since 1800 have been first in 1787 on the Bicentennial of our nation's Constitution, and then second in New York City at Federal Hall on the one-year anniversary of the 9/11 attack on September 11, 2002.

So this will truly be historic to host what would of course be a ceremonial session but still a formal session of Congress right here at Independence Hall. My colleagues and I, again both Democrats and Republicans, Dwight Evans, Bonnie Watson Coleman who are both Democrats, Robert Aderholt of Alabama and Marie Elvira Salazar of Florida who are both Republicans, we believe and the others who have since signed onto the legislation, that this incredibly divisive time in our nation coming here to Independence

Hall and coming here to Philadelphia where it all began a quarter of a millennium ago can help send the right symbol not only to my colleagues in Congress but to all Americans that we are one nation, united, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

And with that, I will conclude. Thank you very much. I look forward to working with you for an exciting next two years.

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Can we give Congressman Boyle a round of applause.

(Applause.)

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Congressman, do you have time for one question? I know you have to run pretty soon.

CONGRESSMAN BOYLE: I do. We are literally in session this evening so right after here I am going to 30th Street Station to

catch my train, but I think we have enough time for one or two questions.

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Are there any questions from members of this Committee for the Congressman?

(No response.)

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Okay, Congressman -- Chair recognizes Councilmember Young.

CONGRESSMAN BOYLE: This is much more friendly than Congress by the way.

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: That's good to hear. We like it that way. Philadelphia is much more friendlier than D.C.

CONGRESSMAN BOYLE: And with a much better partisan makeup.

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: That was the Congressman.

Chair recognizes Councilmember Young.

COUNCILMAN YOUNG: Thank

you, Congressman. Just a quick question about the Semi -- I'm not going to say it, right, the 250th celebration. Is there a little bit of envy or jealousy that Philadelphia will be the eyes of that particular year and how can we get your colleagues to be more supportive of some of the things we're trying to do in Philadelphia being that we are the center, the focal point of the country of when it was founded?

CONGRESSMAN BOYLE:

Well, I regret to report we do have some competition. Some misguided folks in Boston and New York believe that they should be the epicenter, so we are in a competition in order to -- of course, we want to include everybody and all Americans. But obviously right here is literally the nation's birthplace.

We were the capital not only during Colonial American times, but then the formal capital for a decade. From 1790 to 1800 we were the epicenter of the Bicentennial and the Centennial, so of course we should be the epicenter of the Semiquincentennial as well.

Beyond some members from Boston and some members from New York and of course all of us from the Philadelphia area, I would say actually when I've talked to some of my colleagues about my legislation for the ceremonial session of Congress, a lot of times the reaction will be, oh, that's right, that is coming up in 2026.

So with all that's going on especially this year and all that's going on in Congress, I would say it hasn't actually dawned on most of my colleagues that we

have a very important milestone not too far away, so that has also been much of the reaction.

COUNCILMAN YOUNG: Thank you, Congressman.

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Thank you, Councilmember Young.

And because we need you to do the good work of the people of the city of Philadelphia, Congressman, we're going to let you go. Hopefully, you catch your train and be there on time. If we have anything to say about it, hopefully those cities won't be competition at all because like I said earlier we'll probably be celebrating a championship as well too. Go Phillies. All right.

Thank you, Congressman.

CONGRESSMAN BOYLE: Thank you.

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Give the Congressman a round of

applause, everyone.

(Applause.)

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: I just want to make a few remarks before we officially get started. I didn't want to give the remarks before the Congressman spoke because I knew he had a short window and I didn't want to cut off any of his testimony.

So first, as it relates to today's conversation, I want to start by thanking everybody for being here today. Clearly, 2026 is an important conversation that needs to take place. And if anybody didn't think it was important, all you have to do is look around this room and see all of the different representation that's here today.

It's beautiful that the room is packed, but the people that are in this room represent

thousands of workers and people in the city of Philadelphia who know 2026 is on the horizon who's preparing amazing events, a great tourism and hospitality scene, phenomenal nightlife scene. We're going to really show off for the city of Philadelphia. And if anybody thought that we weren't thinking about it, you can tell by this room clearly we're thinking about it and clearly it's a priority.

I want to actually thank some of the people I did earlier, but I need to officially put it on the record. First, I want to start by thanking Governor Shapiro and his team for this year's budget where he made 2026 funding a huge priority.

I have to say thank you to Mayor Parker and the Parker administration who's very deep in

here today. So anybody who thought that this wasn't a priority for City government, you can see the collaborative effort between the Mayor's team as well as City Council, and we're here and we're present to show you it's a huge priority. But especially thank you to our Police Commissioner, Commissioner Bethel, for being here as well as Mr. Newmuis, who's going to be testifying a little shortly.

I want to thank our State partners for being here as well too, and one of those State Reps you'll be hearing from in a little bit, but thank you to the State Reps who are able to come out today. Then I want to say thank you to all of the amazing organizations who met with myself, who met with City Council who have been working together for years now to make sure that 2026 is a huge

success.

I'm not going to read every organization right now. Some of those organizations will be coming up to testify and some of them have submitted written testimony and we'll make sure that we communicate all of those organizations who are advocating and fighting for Philadelphia for the Year 2026 throughout the course of our hearing today.

With that being said, I would like to call up our first panel. Our Chief Clerk, if you could call up our first panel and we can begin officially today's hearing.

THE CLERK: We will next hear from State Representative Jared Solomon and on deck Michael Newmuis. You'd follow the State Representative.

(Witnesses approached

Witness table.)

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: So for this panel, what we'll do is allow Rep Solomon to testify first. Then we'll ask Rep Solomon questions. We know that he has a lot to do as well too so he doesn't have to stay longer than he's needed to be on the panel. Then we'll open it up to the Mayor and the Admin. And every panel after this panel, we'll let the entire panel testify and open it for questions for the entire panel.

But, Rep Solomon, we will make an exception for you. Good afternoon, sir. Please state your name for the record and you may begin your testimony.

STATE REPRESENTATIVE SOLOMON: Councilman Thomas, good afternoon. Jared Solomon, State Representative, 202nd Legislative District in Northeast Philadelphia.

I want to thank you, Councilman Thomas, for your leadership. To all other Councilmembers, Councilmembers Landau, Young and Lozada, thank you. This is such an important issue and it requires all of us, I believe, to be rowing in the same direction, City, state and our federal partners.

I think the possibilities are really great if we get this right. We have the ability to welcome the rest of the nation and world right here to the birthplace of democracy. I think we have a unique challenge in Philadelphia because we are a city of neighborhoods.

So the celebration, for instance, in my neighborhood which is the most diverse in the city, 30 percent of my residents are foreign-born. Some of the way we

might want to celebrate our past, embrace our present and chart a new course for our future might be different than other parties of the city. But I think that unique challenge presents unique possibilities.

Let me tell you what I've done at the state level to try and meet this mission. We formed America250PA, the commission that does all things state-related. We formed that in 2018. In 2022, we passed the legacy infrastructure bill. That took us all around the state in each region two hearings each, 12 total in 6 regions across the Commonwealth, to explore what key infrastructure investments we want to make in anticipation for 2026. And next year we will finally get done a bill called What is Your Pennsylvania Story, which is an educational piece that links

students from Philadelphia with students from Erie to share their unique Pennsylvania and American stories.

This has led us as a commission to many initiatives, educational initiatives. We also have a program called Bells Across Pennsylvania, where we acknowledge and recognize unique historical moments in our Commonwealth that have up to the present gone unrecognized.

In the city we know the great work that you all are doing. Councilman Thomas, you mentioned the World Cup as well as the All Star Game that will be coming in 2026. We know the great work that Danielle's doing at Philadelphia250 as well as Michael Newmuis who is going to testify in a moment and how he's leading the effort through the Mayor's Office.

But here's one area where I think we really do need a sense of urgency and, that is, building things in our great city. This is where I really ask us to work together, and here's why: In 1876, this is sort of the high watermark of these celebrations, the Centennial, 1 in 4 Americans came right here to Philadelphia, 1 in 4.

We built Memorial Hall, which is now the Please Touch Museum, where we held a world's fair that showed our military, industrial, arts and cultural might as a showcase for the rest of the world. In 1926, which by the way was not successful at all, still we built the Municipal Stadium and FDR Park, amongst other things. In 1976, broiled in polite conflict again and as a celebration that was not successful, we built the -- you

mentioned, Councilman, the African American Museum, Independence National Park expanded, the Mummers Museum and the Independence Seaport Museum. 1876, 1926, 1976, key infrastructure investments.

Right now as we all sit here today in Philadelphia, we are on schedule to do zero, zero. And I know you don't want to compete, but in Virginia $47 million has been earmarked for infrastructure. In New Jersey, 25 million has been earmarked for infrastructure. I mean, I know we don't want to compete, but it is New Jersey. That's a special, special -- I think we need to highlight 25 million.

What I am asking us all to do today at the city, state and federal level is to ban together and work towards our common mission to welcome the rest of the world,

the rest of the nation to Philadelphia and lead a lasting infrastructure legacy in our great city. Thank you.

(Applause.)

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Thank you, Rep Solomon. I think after that amazing testimony and listening to you, I know I'm inspired. I guess my first question would be, well, what do you suggest we do?

STATE REPRESENTATIVE SOLOMON: Well, I think we can probably get the Roosevelt Boulevard Subway done.

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: There we go. I should have known.

STATE REPRESENTATIVE SOLOMON: By 2026. I think there's a little -- if it is okay, Councilman Thomas, I can send you the Philly projects that were identified at the hearing. We

identified 168 projects. We vetted them. These are ready for prime time. These are really strong projects. A lot of them are small. So we would have groups that are only asking for $15,000; $20,000; $25,000, some are just needing an HVAC system. And then I would say we collectively should identify one or two large bold projects that we wanted to do. Obviously, we're not going to get them down but we can start the process now through 2026 and beyond.

COUNCILMAN THOMAS:

Thank you, Rep Solomon. I think that is a great charge for us to begin to think about. And you being here is a great example of the importance of government working today on a city, state and federal level. So thank you so much.

Are there any questions

from mem -- Chair recognizes Councilmember Lozada.

COUNCILWOMAN LOZADA: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Just really quickly, of the 168 projects that you all identified you mentioned Philadelphia being a city of neighborhoods. How many of those 168 were specific to smaller neighborhoods, right, as opposed to these large projects that happened here in Center City?

STATE REPRESENTATIVE SOLOMON: The vast majority of them I think there were about 30 to 35, and the vast majority of them are community-based. We tried to bring in nonprofits, leaders, even folks that were just kind of getting the process of thinking about creating that lasting legacy in their community. And I think if you take a look at these projects, I think

you will really be impressed that the projects represent our diversity in our city.

COUNCILWOMAN LOZADA: And how much money do you think we would need to do a few of them?

STATE REPRESENTATIVE SOLOMON: Sure. All in, it's a -- so for all 168 projects across the Commonwealth it is $250 million, which is 92,050 for 250, right. Sounds good, yeah. Philadelphia is about a fourth of that, so 25 percent. And I would think though if you look at the projects, you and your Districts are going to be able to say, oh, I think this group, I really think this is money well-spent. We were just coming at it as a statewide commission, so having your subject matter expertise on the ground is really going to help.

COUNCILMAN THOMAS:

Thank you, Councilmember.

Any other questions from members of the Committee for the Rep?

(No response.)

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Rep, thank you, sir, for being here. Thank you for the charge. I think that that was an amazing charge, but I got to defend New Jersey for a second because my cousin is the Mayor of Camden. Not New Jersey, let's come at Boston or D.C.

STATE REPRESENTATIVE SOLOMON: Thank you.

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Thank you. Thank you, Rep Solomon. We appreciate it. Yeah, please give him a round of applause.

(Applause.)

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Mr. Newmuis, please state your name for the record and you may begin with your testimony.

MR. NEWMUIS: Thank you, Chairman. Michael Newmuis -- Michael Newmuis, 2026 Director for the City of Philadelphia. Good morning -- good afternoon and thank you so much for this opportunity to greet this body. It is really an honor to serve under Mayor Cherelle L. Parker, and -- is there a microphone issue?

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Yes. Just start all over for us.

MR. NEWMUIS: Or is there a voice issue. We'll figure that out. How does that sound? Can you hear me better?

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: (Gestured).

MR. NEWMUIS: Terrific. You know, as Philadelphia's home -- start over? Terrific. Michael Newmuis, 2026 Director for the City of Philadelphia. It's an honor to be with you today and thank you for

the opportunity and privilege to address this body and testify on Resolution 240701.

As Philadelphia's home to America's 250th birthday, 2026 is set up for us as the perfect pitch and we have to hit this one out of the ballpark. Philadelphia will be America's home field for once-in-a-generation experiences, touching millions and potentially generating more than $1 billion in economic wins.

For the Parker administration, we want all Philadelphians to feel involved, not just as spectators but as stakeholders in our shared story, One Philadelphia, a United City. Our goal is to engage every corner of Philadelphia, working with our many partners to bring meaningful investments and the spirit of celebration to residents and

businesses across communities.

For the nation's 250th, we must also ensure that the nation's birthplace takes its rightful place which is center stage. If Philadelphia is to fully leverage 2026, we must stand out from the pack. You know, across the country we are competing against destinations for marketshare in more than 10 host cities for the World Cup. To deliver on our ambitious plans and springboard Philadelphia into an era of new opportunity, public funding is critical.

And so, I would like to discuss the Parker administration's proposal to drive this effort. I'm so pleased to share that as part of the upcoming budgeting process for FY26, operating in capital budgets, the Parker administration is actively preparing to present to

Council a robust budget proposal for 2026 initiatives. This proposal includes funding for programmatic marketing and operational needs.

We aim to compete with destinations and increase economic impact by investing in marketing and business attraction, spread the economic impact of 2026 across each Councilmanic District by investing in commercial corridors and civic activations and set the standard for America's 250th and empower our many partners, many of whom are here today, to deliver memorable experiences while unlocking additional critically-needed philanthropic and corporate dollars.

Now, to talk about a few of the initiatives that we will be building: You know, as the City spearheads a series of 2026

initiatives we're going to seek to spur economic growth, strengthen our image and give residents reasons to get involved. We're going to start by building figurative bridges, figurative gateways to ensure that the people of Philadelphia come out of the 250th stronger than where we currently are. That starts with our Commercial Corridors Gateway Program.

The City will position various commercial corridors across every Council District to benefit from the nation's 250th birthday. This initiative is driven by the Department of Commerce, Visit Philadelphia and Philadelphia250. Commerce will enhance the physical infrastructure of small businesses via storefront improvements, neighborhood placemaking and corridor enhancements. And as

we've got the physical setup, we're also focusing on the digital.

Visit Philadelphia is going to help enhance our businesses' online digital presence with marketing resources. For any restaurant to really succeed and track on Google, you need at least 40 strong images, and Visit Philadelphia is going to provide some free marketing assets to make sure that we get digital assets.

And then finally, Philadelphia250 is going to work to drive the event-based activations which is going to bring the spirit of celebrations to parks and civic areas, while fostering civic engagement and cultural enrichment. Working with Creative Philadelphia, we also aim to layer on community arts programming and then we will also partner with the program that Representative Solomon mentioned

earlier with America250 on a statewide legacy initiative that will invite artists to create 2026 legacies for future generations.

We'll also launch a tour series. Why? Because we're going to actually bring folks directly from Center City to the neighborhoods that we seek to impact and also throughout Center City through a tour series that is going to bring diverse forces to the fold and help drive visitation to our City's historic and cultural landmarks.

There's one other thing I'd really like to announce, which is that Philadelphia is thrilled to invite the world to kick off the 2026 festivities on day 1 with the Philadelphia New Year's Eve Countdown to 2026. We are going to celebrate the nation's anniversary year right here in the streets

where the nation began with an unforgettable evening of live musical performance, drone shows and more. This is an opportunity to both package Philadelphia's incredible slate of 250 offerings, create real economic impact by offering our small businesses vending and other opportunities to get involved, and then also make it clear to the world Philadelphia is where you will be to kick off the nation's 250th anniversary.

And finally, I'll just briefly mention the Portal in Love Park, which was provided to the city at no cost. If you haven't visited, you got to check this out. When the Portal was in New York City, it helped increase tourism in the Flatiron district by 50 percent, and we are going to leverage that to drive foot traffic to businesses that need (inaudible)

Philadelphia in 2026.

Now, 2026 would not be possible without our private-public partnerships. Our partners have been fundraising for years. And with 2026 approaching, City support is critical. The Funder Collaborative for the Semiquincentennial has collectively raised 14.9 -- $14 million which is incredible, and we really do thank that cohort. 95 percent of grants were distributed locally, but despite the current support from the private sector, a funding gap remains and the City must lean in.

To cross the finish line and unlock more philanthropic and corporate support, we will be proposing funding to ensure key 2026 initiatives succeed. Imagine, right, Young People's Continental Congress putting the voices of students and teachers at the center

of the conversation.

ArtPhilly, a citywide arts initiative that will bring our small, medium and neighborhood community art institutions together. To answer the question, what's next for the Breaking bread, Breaking Barriers, the Welcoming Center is going to host an extensive series of citywide dinners and civic dialogues engaging citizens and non-citizens, including from our diverse immigrant communities.

And in 2026 you must uplift our core tradition, including Odunde, Philly Pride, Pennsylvania Juneteenth Parade and Festival, and you can bet Wawa Welcome America will be the biggest and best yet. We already know that sports fans are going to rejoice over incredible activations like the FIFA World Cup matches, the MLB

All Star Game. But before we welcome millions of visitors from across the world, Philadelphia will first salute America's bravest by hosting the National 250th Anniversaries of the U.S. Navy and Marine Corps in October 2025. That week-long activation is expected to generate an economic impact of $100 million.

But importantly, across these events is a different lens, right. It's how do we take the investments we're making and ensure that we're leveraging them not just for one-off events but to drive socioeconomic solutions for the future.

The Navy and Marines event, for instance, is an opportunity to connect Philadelphians with family-sustaining careers and also bring troops into our schools and teach

some civic education. Across the initiatives invested by the City, we will work with our partners to create meaningful economic opportunities for small businesses to take part. We're also going to partner with incredible opportunities like the World Trade Center's Global Expo to connect small businesses here with global opportunities beyond.

As Philly is not new to hosting big events, City departments have been actively planning for 2026. The Office of Special Events, led by Jazelle Jones, is central to our success. As the coordinator of permitting and operational logistics, special events will play a key role in supporting the 250th just as they did for the people visiting DNC and the NFL Draft.

Like past efforts, this

is an all-hands-on-deck effort. Mayor Parker has set a very clear goal to make Philadelphia the safest, cleanest, greenest big city in the nation with economic opportunities for all. All City departments are integral to ensuring that we meet the challenges of this movement, and that's why I'm joined by leadership and representatives from many key departments. I want to thank my colleagues for your continued partnership, prioritization and presence here today.

We recognize the challenges ahead in planning for 2026, including funding of public safety. The FY26 budget is critical to our success, but Philadelphia cannot do this alone. That's why the Parker administration will be requesting state funding to support

anticipated public safety infrastructure expenses, with the majority to be incurred across the City's emergency management, fire and police departments.

In closing, I want to thank you for your partnership, City Council, in making 2026 a transformative year that place the people of Philadelphia at the heart of the celebration. We aim to host world-class events, captivate audiences and drive economic growth that strengthen our city.

You know, I love Philadelphia and when I took on this role of leaving the private sector to come to the public sector, it was because I really do believe 2026 is the greatest opportunity to modern history that we will ever have to position the City and the people of Philadelphia better for the future, so thank you

for your partnership to that end.

COUNCILMAN THOMAS:

Thank you for your testimony. And I think we agree with you -- go ahead.

(Applause.)

COUNCILMAN THOMAS:

Thank you. We agree with you around the importance of 2026 clearly, and that's why we're here today to have this important conversation. And of course, thank you to our amazing host. This is a great facility. And of course, this is going to be the epicenter of a lot of those events that you just discussed, so thank you for being here. For those who haven't been here, you'll probably be spending a lot of time here over the next year or so.

Also, want to go on the record and thank the members of the Mayor's team for being here with

you today. Hopefully, they'll be able to answer any questions if needed. Of course, thank you to Ms. Jazelle Jones; Carlton Williams, who's in charge of Cleaner and Green; and of course our Police Commissioner; Raheem Manning, who's our Nighttime Economy person, and all the other members of the Mayor's administration that are here.

Thank you all so much. We appreciate it, and we know that you recognize the importance -- oh, the Fire Commissioner is here too as well. I'm sorry. Thank you, sir. We appreciate you being here. Thank you. And for the record, you're directly behind Mr. Newmuis. So thank you.

A couple questions and then I'll pass it to Councilmember Lozada. I think the question all of us is dying to know is what is

the number? So you said that the Mayor is looking to put some dollars into next year's budget as it relates to support in 2026.

What is the amount of money that you think the Admin is going to propose in next year's budget for 2026-based initiatives?

MR. NEWMUIS: Thank you for that question. As you know, we've been actively working across partners externally to take a look at what the opportunities are to align those with our overarching goals and making sure that we're investing in opportunities that will help position us for the future. And as part of today's Council hearing, I'm looking forward to hearing from the partners. But I will tell you that we are really confident that we've got a good foundation that we will be building upon based on the

testimony.

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: So you want us to tell you how much money?

MR. NEWMUIS: We're looking forward to hearing from the partners and hearing what other parties and opportunities are out there. We've been doing rigorous surveys, but we will be presenting that number as part of the standard FY26 budget process.

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: All right. Let me go ahead and put 30 million on the record right now. All right. So since you're not going to say a number, we're going to say 30 million up here. All right. So if you're listening to suggestions and recommendations, we're going to go ahead and say 30 million from the City.

How much do you anticipate from the Governor? What

is the plan to be able to go after funding from the state? Uri Munson, who used to be in charge of finances for the School District of Philadelphia, who myself and Commissioner Bethel worked with closely in the past, he's now supporting our Governor, and they gave us an amazing proposal that talked to -- a presentation that talked to us about what they want to see prioritized.

So what is the Admin's plan to be able to support some of the coalitions that's in the room as well as those that's not in the room right now to be able to go after some level of state funding and how much state funding does the Admin plan to advocate for?

MR. NEWMUIS: From the Admin's perspective we want to make sure that as we are inviting millions of folks to our city and

ensuring that we are offering our residents incredible opportunities to commemorate this experience, that we do so with the safest, safest, safest lens and public safety is our top priority.

So from the state perspective we're going to be asking for support to cover overtime for first responders, other public safety infrastructure, and ensuring that we can provide that funding to Philadelphia to make sure that although we're going to have incredible partners executing great events and the City will help some of that programmatic that we're going to ask the state to really lean in on the public safety infrastructure.

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Okay. So I'll put another number out there. So if we're asking for the City to do 30, we will want the

state to do anywhere from 40 to 50. Now, I don't know if we can realistically attain those numbers from the state, but we do know that in this year's budget the Governor earmarked money from this year's budget as well as looking at next year's budget, and we also know the state has a $10 billion-plus surplus.

So I think that an investment from the state around 50 million can put us in a position to be able to return much more revenue to the state than the 50 million that we're essentially requesting. I know the Arts and Culture community alone who's coming up to testify in a little bit, that community alone asked for north of 30 million just for arts and culture, right.

(Applause.)

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: So

if we know the Arts and Culture community is going to ask for about 30 million, and that will deal with funding from both the City and the state, we have so many other communities outside of Arts and Culture. We know we have FIFA coming, so we know that the sports community is going to be asking for money as well too.

So you figure that the sports community has already asked for well over $10 million. And that's just two industries. There's so many other industries across the city of Philadelphia and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania that's going to be requesting revenue that I think it is imperative that we have specific dollar amounts that we want to advocate for.

Now, if the Admin is not prepared for those dollar amounts

today, I don't think that's the end of the world because we all want as much money as possible to be able to make these things happen. But I also think it's important that the private sector who has done a heavy lifting already hears numbers from us as it relates to government, specifically what we want to ask for, right, not what we actualize, so that they know that we're willing to put skin in the game and that they know that their organizing efforts so far is not taken in vain. So I just wanted to put those things on the record.

A couple other questions and then I'll move on. You talked a little bit about neighborhoods and corridors. One of the charges that we have on the Council side, and we're going to push this charge on the Admin because we know you're going to receive it with open arms,

we have to make sure that the only people who don't benefit from this are Center City folks.

So we know the Constitution area is going to do well. We know Avenue of the Arts is going to do well. We know Vine Street is going to do well. But what about North Philadelphia where Councilmember Young represents? What about Kensington in the 7th Councilmanic District where Councilmember Lozada represents? I live in the 9th Councilmanic District, which the Mayor used to be my District Councilperson.

So what is the plan outside of cleaning corridors, right? You guys do a great job with clean and green. We're all sold on the One Philly. What do we do outside of cleaning corridors and storefront improvement? I heard you talk about cleaning

corridors, I heard you talk about storefront improvement, and you also talked about a stronger presence online. I think all of those things are a great start.

But what can we do when we think about the hundreds of thousands of people that are coming to the city of Philadelphia? How can we make sure that they go to the 7th Councilmanic District and do it in a way that's economically beneficial to them? What can we do to get those folks in North Philly in a way that's economically beneficial to that neighborhood and other neighborhoods as well too?

(Applause.)

MR. NEWMUIS: Yeah, thank you for that. I think it's important I connect the dots around some of these core initiatives, because ultimately they're all driven to make sure that we're

spreading the economic impact out to the neighborhoods. The Commercial Corridors initiative is going to drive over 20 different commercial corridors, like, solid investments and activations. We're going to use marketing to literally turn these into gateways.

These are neighborhoods that historically have not always benefited from the economic impact of tourism from big events, but now we're looking at it from a different lens. What if we were to make these anchors and what if we were to invest in programs like the ArtPhilly Festival that's going out to Kensington, that's going out to Germantown, that's going out to various hubs and say this will be a signature event. And what if we were to say, hey, ArtPhilly, would you mind actually layering your programming across the same period

as the World Cup so we can capture this incredible audience.

So you're going to find in the plan that we put neighborhoods first, we put people of Philadelphia first. And through the initiatives where you're going to see investment, these are opportunities to spread the celebration and tourism footprint outside of just Center City.

And importantly, the investments are not just about 2026. These are how do we position these corridors and neighborhoods to succeed well beyond these events.

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: So what I would ask on the record is that the Admin make a commitment to working with the District Councilmembers as it relates to 2026 preparedness to ensure that what you just talked about and what

we're concerned with as it relates to making sure neighborhoods benefit from this, that there's a coordinated effort with the District Councilmembers to make sure that every District across the city of Philadelphia, some of our most vulnerable Districts, are somehow economically going to benefit from all of the tourism that exists in the city of Philadelphia. So that's one of the acts that I'll have as it relates to what we would like to see as it relates to a coordinated effort with the Admin.

Two more questions: Nightlife in Philadelphia sucks. It does. That's just the reality. We have --

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: (Inaudible).

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Hey, listen, it's the truth. We got to

own it, you know. We pat ourselves on the back when we do something good and when we have things that are not the best, we have to do something about it. So after this -- so just three more questions. Real quick about nightlife. Not only is nightlife not the best, but we had a food truck program that we were looking to do as it relates to a specific initiative that for some reason didn't come to fruition.

What is the vision of the Admin as it relates to the nightlife scene in the city of Philadelphia and what can we do to make sure that our nightlife scene is more vibrant than what it is right now as we prepare for 2026?

MR. NEWMUIS: Thank you for that question. I'm going to ask my colleague Raheem Manning to come join and to provide you with a

response.

COUNCILMAN THOMAS:

Thank you.

(Applause.)

MR. NEWMUIS: Raheem is the Nighttime Economy Manager out of the Department of Commerce.

COUNCILMAN THOMAS:

Please state your name for the record and you may begin with your testimony. And please be brief.

MR. MANNING: Got you.

Raheem Manning, Director of Nighttime Economy and Business Development based out of the Department of Commerce. Thank you for having me. Thank you for your question. As we know we do have struggles in nightlife, and you've been a great champion with creating this position so that we can shepherd our nightlife, become more competitive.

When we look at 2026 and

how we're preparing not only Center City and our entertainment districts but our neighborhoods, we want to ensure that they're able to benefit from the activities and the tourism that are here. As you guys know, we're a city of neighborhoods. A lot of our people have entertainment, whether it's a bar, lounge or a club in their neighborhood that they can go to. Those businesses need to benefit from 2026 as well.

Some of the things that we're doing to ensure that we're able to, one, be globally competitive is understanding who our market is during 2026. A lot of our visitors for FIFA and other of these world events are going to come from European markets or South American markets, and they move differently.

They're going to be

doing different time frames. FIFA alone is taking place over four different time zones. So you may be celebrating your team's win at 1:30 in the morning because they're in the LA timezone. So how do we ensure that our visitors there are able to have places, one, to get quality eats but also to celebrate and entertain.

One, we commissioned an economic impact study in partnership with Visit Philly and also Econsult, in which we're talking about where the dollars and activity in our nighttime economy is. That economic impact study will be available for Council in the next coming weeks. That shows us, one, also the tax revenue that we bring in from nighttime businesses alone, and I'm telling you now it is very large and staggering when you look at some of

the preliminary numbers.

The other part of it is we are going to be petitioning for some, you know, law changes, right. We lose out on nightlife like you said, Councilman Thomas, to New York or D.C. or some other municipalities or competitive cities because we do close relatively early and we don't have our businesses set up for later events.

And when you think about the 2026 market, those people are going to be here on six-, seven, eight-hour different time frames. Not going to be hungry at 8:00 p.m., they're not going to be hungry at 9:00. They're going to be hungry at 1:00, 2:00, 3:00 in the morning and we need to be able to meet that.

Our Overnight Food Truck Market program, which is still a

program that is in progress, is being worked out now so that we have the legal right to do it. As you know, in the city of Philadelphia it is illegal to vend after midnight. We are working with Councilmember Mark Squilla and the rest of our Council support to extend our ability to vend after midnight in our designated well-kept, well-lit and safe places for people to have late-night eats. And this is a program that we want to roll out in multiple districts so it's not just a downtown program. We started in Fishtown and we want to go into some of the other programs there.

I'll wrap up by saying that the Parker administration and the Commerce Department understand the role that nightlife in itself is going to play when it comes to making sure people want to come

back to the city of Philadelphia. It's the big events we know how to do very well. I think we are focusing on this big event and understanding the role that nightlife itself will play in ensuring that Philadelphia is the most globally competitive hub for art, culture and entertainment for 2026 and beyond.

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Thank you, Raheem. I would ask that you just stay available if questions come up from other members of this specific Committee that you might be the expert to answer. So thank you for that.

One more question and a request. So because both of our Commissioners are here, are you both okay with just giving us, you know, just a 60-second perspective on how you see 2026 and what you're doing to prepare, both our Police

Commissioner and our Fire Commissioner; is that okay? Can you guys do that for us?

COMMISSIONER BETHEL: (Gestured affirmatively).

COMMISSIONER THOMPSON: (Gestured affirmatively).

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: All right. So before the Commissioners come up, my last question for you, Ms. Newmuis, so right now it's no secret that City Council is listening to a proposal around the Sixers building a new arena not too far from here.

Hypothetically speaking, if this proposal is approved, one of the concerns that I communicated to the Sixers earlier this week is will the construction of the arena have any impact on traffic in 2026, and they did not give me a definitive yes. So I'm wondering if you or anybody from the Admin

can assure us that if the arena is approved, that construction in 2026 will not impact tourism.

And if you're not the person to answer that, I'm wondering if anybody else from the Admin is here to be able to talk specifically about construction traffic in 2026 and that impact on the tourism that we're going to see?

MR. NEWMUIS: Sure. I'll be happy to invite my colleague Rich Montanez up.

(Witness approached Witness table.)

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Thank you. And then after Rich, if it's okay I'll pass it to both of our Commissioners.

And please, if you could just greet us, we want to definitely give you a round of applause for the great work that

you do for the city of Philadelphia. And just talk to us a little bit about safety from your perspective as it relates to 2026.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER MONTANEZ: Good afternoon, Councilmember. Richard Montanez, First Deputy Commissioner of Streets. The Streets Department is committed to work with the Sixers to make sure that whatever they do in 2026 does not impact any traffic or commerce at the time.

We have yet to review the maintenance and protection of traffic or the demolition plans, so it's kind of hard to speak of what they're planning until we start to see it in black and white.

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Okay. Thank you. We appreciate that commitment, and that's the type of energy we need to make sure 2026 is the economic engine that we

know it could be.

If you can all join me in giving a round of applause to our Commissioners that are coming up.

(Applause.)

COMMISSIONER BETHEL: We have -- if you don't know here in the city of Philadelphia, we have two of the finest Commissioners in the entire country. I'm not familiar with other cities, but I do know that these two gentlemen do an amazing job as it relates to serving and protecting the city of Philadelphia.

So we're honored to have you here. If you don't mind, just take maybe 60 seconds a piece just to let us know what's happening through your lens and your perspective as it relates to 2026. And when you're finished, I'll open it up to my colleagues for

questions, and I'll start with Councilmember Lozada.

COMMISSIONER THOMPSON: Good afternoon, everyone. Thank you for this opportunity. My name is Jeffrey Thompson, and I'm the Fire Commissioner. The Fire Department understands how important it is for public safety. Public safety is a cornerstone of any successful society, and the Fire Department stands ready to do its continued share.

We are currently in planning stages getting ready for 2026. In addition to that, still responding to our almost 1000 calls that we manage per day. So as was mentioned earlier, we are used to managing large events, the RNC, DNC and others. So we feel as though we are prepared to upscale and adapt to manage and handle the challenges of 2026 while

maintaining the ability to provide public safety for the citizens and visitors to the city of Philadelphia.

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Thank you, sir. We have one of the most amazing fire departments in the entire country if you don't know. So we appreciate all that you do and we believe that you will have us ready and safe for 2026. Thank you, sir.

(Applause.)

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Commissioner Bethel.

COMMISSIONER BETHEL: So thank you, Councilman. So we have been working. I know the Office of Emergency Management, Dominick is here and his team is here. We've been meeting. My team has been meeting with them, talking across the nation to other departments that have hosted large events.

As I said earlier in the press conference, we are a city that has done a lot of large events but this is going to be significant for us. And so, I think the conversation that you're having around the supports we're going to need and raise overtime, et cetera, you know, because to your earlier point when it says the impact of the neighborhoods, we need to be able to continue to manage our neighborhoods and address the issues, 911 response at the same time and host these events, and that's going to take a significant level of staffing to accomplish that.

And so, as we have these conversations and we move forward to 2026, we'll start to put our core plans together. And that is going to be critical because during the summer is our most challenging

time in the city as well and it's also at our lower staffing levels because of vacations, et cetera, so we're going to have to work across the board with many of our partners not just us locally, but our state partners and federal partners as we go about this charge.

(Applause.)

COUNCILMAN THOMAS:

Thank you, Commissioner. We appreciate you so much. And I think if I heard correctly, we had both a state legislator and a federal legislator talk about money so when that overtime starts to rack up, right, we're going to remember that on the record they said that they will help us out a little bit.

Thank you both and thank you both for the great work that you do.

COMMISSIONER BETHEL:

Thank you for your support. Thank you.

COMMISSIONER THOMPSON:

Thank you.

COUNCILMAN THOMAS:

Chair recognizes Councilmember Lozada.

COUNCILWOMAN LOZADA:

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm not really sure who can answer this question. I mean, one of my biggest concerns was ensuring that our commercial corridor partners also were able to benefit economically from what is happening downtown. I don't think that as a city we do a good enough job to be able to move what is happening downtown into the neighborhood so that some of our small businesses could take advantage of that.

And so, I'm really looking forward to ensuring that

that actually does happen in a way that doesn't impact quality of life for our residents. It's no secret that I represent one of the most challenging neighborhoods in the city of Philadelphia, Kensington.

So I'm curious to hear, as you all are preparing for 2026 and all of the celebrations -- which I'm super excited about, right -- but I also am concerned that while we are saying that we are going to not impact how we respond to the needs, the day-to-day needs over there because we focus so much of our resources up here, I'm concerned about that actually happening.

And so, for me people come into our city and they want to come see what Kensington looks like, right. They want to see what they've seen on videos. They want to see what they've seen on TikTok.

And so, I'm curious to know how are we going to respond to that. How are we going to make sure that when Philadelphia or while Philadelphia is under a microscope, how are we going to ensure that my neighbors are not looked upon in a certain way because we've not done our due diligence in making sure that we're able to respond to the 500 to 700 unsheltered population out there, the open air narcotics, the sex work, the open fires that we talked about this morning?

There are so many things that need to be addressed in the Kensington, Harrowgate, Frankford communities. How are we going to ensure that visitors don't come to Philadelphia and see how beautiful it is here, and then just a few miles down the road we look like a third world country. And so, I want to hear from you all. I want

to work with you all to figure that out.

I want to trust that you are not going to allow visitors to come into our city and look at my community in a certain way. And so, I want to make sure that when you're having those conversations, tell me what have the conversations been if you've had them and what is the plan.

MR. MANNING: So I'll speak to a couple of your questions there. And first of all, at the Department of Commerce we're always thinking about how we prepare our corridors and our neighborhoods, right. And through the Department of Commerce, we have several programs that are geared towards investing into our corridors.

So as we talk about 2026 and we talk about lighting up the corridors and bringing people to

those neighborhoods, we're also reaching out to the biz, the CDCs and organizations that are on the ground to ask them what do they need to prepare their neighborhood because we are a city of neighborhoods. All of our neighborhoods are very unique for all different reasons, and we want to make sure that we are not telling our neighborhoods what to do and how they should celebrate 2026, but being a partner and making sure that we're providing the resources for their neighborhoods to shine the way they want to.

We have a Corridor Enhancement Grant program that's available for all of our major corridors and city through the Department of Commerce. Those corridor enhancement grants can be used for anything from

beautification projects to throwing on events that bring and celebrate the culture of the corridor as well.

We have our Storefront Improvement Program. So if you have businesses in your District that have been operating but want to update their look so that they can meet the changing neighborhood, we have programs that will reimburse businesses for their costs for that.

We have Instore programs. Again, if you have a business that has been in your corridor that's been there for a while that wants to update, right, again, these are mom-and-pop businesses, we're able to support --

COUNCILWOMAN LOZADA: I don't want to cut you off. I don't want to cut you off, but that's not

what I want to know. We do storefront improvement every day. We do investments with Commerce all the time. I'm talking about real opportunities to make sure that my community is not -- that people don't walk away from here and say, that really does look like it looks on the videos, right.

It's not -- we all know what Kensington looks like. And if you don't know what Kensington looks like, shame on you. If you're a resident, if you're an employee of the City, if you're a provider in this city, if you do events in the city and you don't know what Kensington looks like, shame on you.

But my community has told everybody really loud what they need and what they want to see and how they deserve quality of life. We are talking about

millions being invested into this city as a result of this event. So I am going to -- the Mayor always says, don't listen to what I'm saying, watch what I'm doing.

My residents are watching what we're doing. My residents deserve to be in the forefront of these conversations when we're talking about preparing downtown to receive millions of people into our city, who will -- I mean, you can't be blind to this. They're going to want to go see what they see on these videos, right.

I don't want people to think about my community by how it looks because there are thousands of men, women and children in the Kensington community who are amazing, resilient people. I want people to walk away to say that the City recognized that they have a

huge epidemic in their community and their city and they're responding to it while still making ways for huge celebrations to happen. So we can't say that we're going to identify federal, city and state dollars to prepare this city for 2026 and we can't identify those same dollars to make sure that we restore quality of life in the city of Philadelphia in the Kensington Harrowgate community.

(Applause.)

MR. NEWMUIS:

Councilmember, I just want you to know that I hear you loud and clear. And I think that we should have a really thoughtful conversation as we lay out for you in your office -- and we're reaching out to each and every Councilmember -- but to lay out what the plans are, to make sure that the locations are aligned, to

make sure that the community members who need to be involved.

One of the first steps that we took on the commercial corridor gateway --

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: I'm sorry. Let me just cut you off because we're going to run low on time. We know the programs. That's not what the Councilmember is asking. Let me paint a picture for you, right. I came to Philly for the World Cup. While I was going to the bathroom or whatever I was doing, somebody told me about this place called Kensington. So I look it up on Twitter and I see all of these hashtags around Kensington, Kensington Beach. So now, after the game I want to go ride to Kensington to see if what they're saying is real.

What the Councilmember is asking when that person leaves

the thing that brought them to the city of Philadelphia and their social media told them about this area called Kensington and when they ride over there with their phone and their camera, do we have a plan to make sure that what they record is not what we see right now.

And if we don't have a plan, I think what the Councilmember is asking for is a commitment to work with her over the next couple weeks, months, to put us in a position so when people come to this city to visit, that we don't go viral because of some random video that they caught on Kensington Avenue. I think that's what the Councilmember is asking.

So we're well aware of the programs and we're happy that 2026 is a priority, but the Councilmember is raising a point

specifically about the Kensington area and the likelihood of the city going viral not because of a homerun at the All Star Game or goal kicked at the FIFA, but because of a video taken in Kensington.

COUNCILWOMAN LOZADA: Thank you, Councilmember.

MR. NEWMUIS: Absolutely. We are fully committed. If I may, we partnered with groups like the North Square Neighborhood, different groups on the ground. But to your point, we need to have a really clear, detailed conversation and make sure that we have a robust plan to address that very concern.

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: I think after listening to Councilmember Lozada I think that there should be a separate plan just for Kensington 2026, right.

We can have a Philadelphia plan for 2026. But there should be something separate specifically towards Kensington.

(Applause.)

COUNCILWOMAN LOZADA: And that goes for every event, right. The last thing we want -- we want people to walk away from Philadelphia and say, darn, that was a really great event. I want to come back to Philadelphia after all of these activities because I want to continue to see what the city has to offer, but we don't get that, right.

I can't tell you the number of times that people have come to Philadelphia and they've walked around downtown and it's beautiful, and then they go down to Kensington and that's all they report on, right. We can't talk about economic opportunity. We

can't talk about investments. We can't talk about how great this city is when we are allowing an entire neighborhood to be impacted negatively because we can't seem to figure out how we have an honest conversation about what we need to do to restore quality of life there.

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Thank you.

Chair recognizes Councilmember Young, then Councilmember Landau, and then we will move on to the next panel.

COUNCILMAN YOUNG: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Just questions regarding opportunities you mentioned for Philadelphians during 2026. You said you've begun to identify what those opportunities are. Is there a timeline on when the City will have a good sense of when these

opportunities, particularly these vendor opportunities, these contracting opportunities will become available, but what type of opportunities will be available and how will the City be marketing that to its residents to get them ready to participate in this billion dollar century economy that's going to happen in our city in 2026?

MR. NEWMUIS: We do. You know, by Q2 of 2025 we showed some pretty clear understanding based on the billion dollars which is related to FIFA World Cup, a very clear understanding of what the contracting looks like for that specific initiative.

I'm happy to have Meg Kane speak to that who's here, but we are working across -- as we have this budget in place, as we have conversations about where we would and where we would not want to see

activations, we can then really think through what opportunities will be available for our small businesses to participate.

COUNCILMAN YOUNG: To follow up on that, yeah, we know about the World Cup opportunities that are coming available but -- sorry. We know about the World Cup opportunities in 2026. But we don't control that in Philadelphia, right. That's a FIFA thing that, you know, FIFA rules are FIFA rules, so I'm not even going to try to include that in the things I'm talking about.

So essentially things that we have control over in Philadelphia, like how are we going to market, again, all these opportunities during the -- we have the All Star Game, we have Congress coming. We have all these things.

Are we looking to kind

of maybe relax some regulations to allow more small vendors to participate in some of these locations throughout the city? What specifically are we doing to allow more people to participate in in the 2026 economy?

MR. MANNING: One of the things that the Mayor has made a priority to do in the Department of Commerce is look at, one, the processes to engage and do business in the city and simplify them. The Department of Commerce, the Office of Policy and Strategic Initiatives have literally taken a review of all things, from vending to again contracting with the City to simplify so that those opportunities that are available are easy for people to get, and especially those disadvantaged businesses which is a high priority.

We've already started that process reviewing. We're continuing to work with departments throughout the city as well as with Council on how we can simplify and make the ease of doing business with the City better.

COUNCILMAN YOUNG: Thank you. Thank you so much, Mr. Chair.

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Thank you.

Chair recognizes Councilmember Landau. And this will be the last question for the Admin.

COUNCILWOMAN LANDAU: Thank you. Thanks so much for being here. I think I just want to underscore what my colleague Quetcy Lozada was saying earlier and maybe reframe it in a different way. One great thing that we could do for 2026, especially knowing the profit that the City in general will

probably have from this, is to do the intense investment that we need now to make sure that we have a Philadelphia success story to show the world.

How great would this be if we were a leader among cities, leader among cities of so many who are struggling with people who are unhoused, who are addicted, who need services, who need programs, that if we did a deep, deep investment in this now and had a great success, that we could do the bus tour that we want so badly to bring them all around Kensington to show them this is what you do when you care for your people, you care for your neighborhood and you care for your infrastructure.

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Did you want a response?

COUNCILWOMAN LANDAU: Sure. I'd love to hear your

thoughts on that.

MR. NEWMUIS: I think we're fully aligned. So thank you. We will have a robust follow-up conversation to make sure that we deliver on the promise of this opportunity, but make sure that the people are at the center and that neighbors that have historically not benefit can do so and look their best. So I really do appreciate that feedback.

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Thank you for your testimony. We appreciate it. And I think so many people here are glad to hear some of the initiatives that City government has under way, the fact that we have an appetite for it. We appreciate the charge, the commitment to working together and the work that you've done so far. So thank you all for being here.

(Applause.)

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: If the Clerk could please call the next panel to come testify.

THE CLERK: The Committee will next hear from Gregg Caren from Philadelphia Convention and Visitors Bureau; Meg Kane from Philadelphia Soccer 2026 and Michael DelBene from Welcome America.

(Witnesses approached Witness table.)

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: While these groups are coming up and while we're transitioning, I wanted to give a few shout-outs to some organizations that are here that's provided written testimony but will not be testifying today.

Is there anybody here from the African American Museum? If you're here, thank you for being here. I know I'm on the Board of that organization, so thank you

all.

Anybody here from Philly Legendary Hoops Month? Please stand up. Mike Morak, Rahim Thompson, please stand up. Thank you both. Thank you for your written testimony. We appreciate your advocacy.

Anybody here from the William Penn Foundation? Thank you all for being here. We appreciate you. We appreciate your written testimony.

With that being said, I'm very excited to welcome this next panel. I want to thank you all for the work that you've done in the private sector as it relates to making sure Philadelphia is on the verge of being prepared, and I want to allow you to testify.

So for this panel, what we'll do is we'll ask that you say your name, you communicate your

testimony. We'll allow all of you to testify consecutively. Then we'll open it up for questions from the panel. So whoever wants to go first please state your name for the record and you may begin.

MR. CAREN: First, Chair Thomas, Councilmembers Lozada and Landau and Young, thank you for showing the importance you have for this topic. Thanks to all of our City leaders, our leaders from Harrisburg, leaders from D.C. It's a big year for us, but there are a lot of other years before and after that as well. That's part of my testimony today.

So my name is Gregg Caren. I'm the President and CEO of the Philadelphia Convention and Visitors Bureau. We are the economic catalyst for tourism through large groups, meetings, sporting events. We're also

responsible for international tourism. So year after year, with or without a World Cup our job is to bring the 1.5 million visitors that visit Philadelphia from around the world, establish Philadelphia as the gateway, the gateway, to come to the United States and visit and have a great American experience.

To add some color commentary, whenever you see or hear or attend events, a lot of which have been mentioned today, the NFL Draft, the RNC, the DNC, the People Visit World meeting of Families and every convention, every Divine Nine, and we've hosted all nine of the Divine Nine in Philadelphia, but I always like to say whenever you see somebody with a name tag walking on the streets of Philadelphia, that's the results of the work of the Philadelphia

Convention and Visitors Bureau. So we're focused on that year after year.

In our line of business, we measure success by the economic impact of these events on the region, the rooms booked in area hotels, the people that populate our restaurants, cultural attractions, businesses, small, Black, Brown, and every other business throughout every neighborhood in this city.

As we race towards 2026, the PHLCVB has successfully positioned 2025 to also be a vibrant convention event year estimated to generate more than $221 million in economic impact, as our team is still actively booking business for the next year.

In partnership with the Philadelphia Eagles, we will host the 2025 FIFA Club World Cup in

2025 at Lincoln Financial Field. These will have match dates in June and July of this coming summer, serve as a prelude, really a dress rehearsal if you will, before the World Cup in 2026.

We anticipate 2026 will not only have a great impact on hospitality jobs and the personal income of the region's hospitality workers, but it will leave a lasting impression of Philadelphia and the Commonwealth with event planners, international visitors for years to come.

The PHLCVB will actually begin 2026 by hosting the World Cup of Meeting Planners. You may not have heard of that one, Mr. Chair. But for us, the World Cup of Meeting Planners is an organization called PCMA. It will meet here in January of 2026. It is the most critical gathering of decision-

makers, every one of which will come here with new eyes on Philadelphia, and every one of which will go home, 5000 of them, with an opportunity to bring their own individual meetings and conventions to Philadelphia in years to come.

So much so that actually our friends in San Diego hosted this event earlier in 2024. They anticipate a half a million room nights of future group and convention bookings as a result of hosting that event, in addition to the $17 million of economic impact the event itself brought to the city of San Diego.

To date, the PHLCVB has already booked 20 citywide conventions and events, plus the World Cup matches, all six of them. Each of them is the equivalent of a citywide convention in our eyes.

This confirmed convention business alone will bring 1.5 million overnight visits, $950 million in direct spending and $1 billion in economic impact as that money cycles through our city and region.

In addition to the financial support of our industry and private foundations -- Chair, you mentioned a few of them that are here in this room -- the PHLCVB is seeking $1 million towards ensuring the success of these events and, more importantly, leveraging our ability to secure future bookings in the city of Philadelphia.

Our agency has been the sales and marketing team behind the successful bids for both the All Star Game and FIFA World Cup, working closely with our professional sports teams and corporate partners, most notably

Philadelphia Phillies, the Philadelphia Eagles and Comcast who have helped back and helped us leverage booking big events in this city for a long time.

One small statistic: When the NFL Draft was here in 2017, on the last day of the NFL Draft that was the day that the RFP for the World Cup actually hit our office. So if we think about that, that's seven years ago and nine years away from the event itself. So while everybody is running in the streets celebrating the NFL Draft, our team is back in the conference room working on the RFP that led to the entire engagement of this city, this Commonwealth, and our corporate partners, hospitality partners to actually secure the World Cup for 2026.

Looking at 2027 and beyond, our ultimate goal is not to

look back at '26 as a spike year but as a new plateau. It's an opportunity for us to launch our tourism economy. Our work allows us to book business long into the future. We have a much longer lens than just '25, '6 or '7. We actually are booking events into the late '20s and into the mid-2030s and securing those events for the city. We'll also welcome back the Army Navy game in 2027 as well, and we continue to sell and build on these numbers for conventions, meetings, special events.

Not only are we marketing and selling Philadelphia as a premier convention and events destination, but we're also responsible for marketing to international travelers as the official tourism promotion agency for the city of Philadelphia

globally. With Philadelphia serving as the world's gateway to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, our reach spans 18 countries, partnering with 10 in-market agents representing Philadelphia.

Our efforts to reach international travelers also has significant impact on our local economy. Philadelphia is on track to welcome 1.2 million international visitors by the end of this year alone, resulting in 3 million hotel room nights and over $767 million in direct spending across the city.

Beyond its direct contributions to the hospitality sector, international tourism has far-reaching impact on local businesses, large and small, through our neighborhoods. Each international visitor supports our diverse economy, not only staying

in hotels but spending money through the businesses I mentioned before.

As Philadelphia prepares to host a large influx of international travelers in 2026, our media relations team ensures that the City's local reputation continues to rise. Philadelphia's tourism appeal has been revered in international media across Canada, Europe and as far as China, India and Australia.

Most notably thanks to our team's persistent efforts, Philadelphia is recognized with a dedicated Michelin Green Guide, only the eighth in the country, highlighting the region's top experiences for international leisure travelers.

Our partnership with Philadelphia International Airport also plays a pivotal role.

Together we are solidifying the airport's reputation as one of the key gateways to the United States. In the last year this collaboration has resulted in five new international flight routes with promising developments under way in additional high-potential markets for direct air service to PHL.

With these strengthening connections, 2026 will be a defining year for Philadelphia and Pennsylvania. This landmark moment will bring unprecedented exposure, putting our region on the map for counties, countless travelers who may be considering a visit to Philadelphia for the first time.

We look forward to working with our industry partners, the City of Philadelphia and the Commonwealth to ensure we are leveraging the potential of this momentous year for many, many more

years to come. I thank you.

(Applause.)

MS. KANE: Good afternoon and thank you for the opportunity to testify here today. My name is Meg Kane and I am the Host City Executive of Philadelphia Soccer 2026. I bring greetings from our Board of Directors, chaired by Dan Hilferty, vice-chaired by Michelle Singer. And today we have a 60-member delegation from FIFA that is currently at Lincoln Financial Field walking the property. So we have left the Philadelphia Eagles and the rest of our team to handle that while I'm here with other members of our team.

As we know, there are a multitude of events scheduled for 2026. And as a proud Philadelphian, I could not be more excited for each of these diverse

celebrations rooted in arts and culture, history and sports. But as CEO for Philadelphia Soccer 2026, it would be shortsighted to view each event of '26 as similar in size, scope, nature or impact. They simply are not.

FIFA World Cup 2026 will generate a greater economic impact than any sporting event convention or celebration ever before held in Philadelphia or Pennsylvania, 40 days, 500,000 expected visitors with 50 percent of those visitors coming internationally. A FIFA Fan Festival, which will welcome 15,000 to 25,000 visitors per day and six matches, including a round of 16 matches hosted here between June 14th and concluding on July 4th of 2026, because obviously we didn't have that much else going on that day.

The impact of FIFA World

Cup will be massive and vast. Here are just a few numbers that I ask members of City Council to take away from this testimony today: 770 million; that is the total projected economic impact of FIFA World Cup 2026 in the Philadelphia region.

For every $1 that Philadelphia Soccer 2026 in the city of Philadelphia invests in the World Cup experience, it is expected that this investment will return $4 to $6 for the Pennsylvania economy.

There will be 6615 jobs projected to be created, both directly and indirectly, 314 million in projected employee compensation related to this event, and $51 million in tax revenue across the Commonwealth, with nearly 30 million directly into the city of Philadelphia.

Now, there is still much work to be done with FIFA to understand contracting roles and identify the economic opportunities available through procurement. Philadelphia Soccer 2026 remains committed to advocating for greater local opportunities with FIFA as well as communicating these opportunities to City Council, the Parker administration and the Chambers of Commerce when fully known. This is an ongoing conversation with FIFA, and we are hopeful that by Q1, Q2 of '25 the understanding around which contracts will lie and be governed by FIFA, potentially at a national or international level, and which contracts will be governed by Philadelphia Soccer 2026 and/or the City of Philadelphia will be clearer.

And while these

projected economic figures are promising, these are just projections unless we come together now. Philadelphia Soccer 2026, as the local organizing committee, serves as the facilitator of the daily work with FIFA. And to that end, our efforts remain focused on the execution of tournament operations at the stadium complex and the delivery of FIFA Fan Festival at Lemon Hill.

Our business and philanthropic communities have rallied around this effort with terrific financial support since the bid began in 2017 and we continue to work closely with the Office of Special Events, led by our City Representative Jazelle Jones, the office of Emergency Management, the Office of Transportation Infrastructure and Safety, the Philadelphia Police

Department, the Philadelphia Fire Department and Parks & Recreation as well as many other City agencies and offices that are coming together to be part of this event and ensuring that the City services that are required by FIFA are incorporated into the City's comprehensive planning for 2026.

We seek to be complementary and not competitive, but there is still much to do and public support and engagement in this effort are vital to success. We are grateful to the Parker administration for its commitment of $3.5 million in capital support for infrastructure upgrades of Lemon Hill, our Fan Festival location.

But beyond the necessary City services, Philadelphia Soccer 2026 respectfully requests operational support of $6 million

from the City of Philadelphia. These funds will allow us to fulfill FIFA-mandated requirements related to cyber security, social impact and environmental sustainability implementation and tracking as well as the design and implementation of critical wayfinding throughout the city of Philadelphia.

This funding will also allow us to develop and implement our transportation mobility plan, critical safety and security initiatives, an event preparation campaign for Philadelphia's residents. It is critically important to us that this event is not something that Philadelphia residents feel that is happening to them but they are part of.

We welcome everybody as part of the local organizing committee and we are all on the

welcoming committee. In terms of neighborhood -- and I think that this is critically important to the questions that you've asked, Councilmember Lozada, and of course the conversations that we've had previously, Councilmember Young -- we will not know the teams that will be coming to Philadelphia to play matches until December of 2025 so we will not know the nations that will be coming and, therefore, the fan bases.

However, we will be preparing and working with our partners, specifically Visit Philadelphia and the City so that when that moment comes in December of 2025 and we know the nations that will be coming, at least for the first five matches in the group stage, we can be prepared to really engage the neighborhoods where those immigrant communities are

because this will be an incredible moment for them to shine and to elevate and to be part of the story that Philadelphia tells. So that is very important to us, but we have to align with the FIFA timeline for that. And so, that information and that planning really turns on at the beginning of 2026 just for context.

Now, I know I have provided several numbers with you today, but the final number that I leave you with is 570. We have 570 days until FIFA World Cup 2026 begins. That is not a lot of time, but we successfully competed to host. We invited the world to come and now we must rise to this generational occasion and deliver, not just for the success of 2026 on the global stage but for the success of the City of Philadelphia in 2027 and beyond.

I know we can do it. I am confident we can, and we look forward to our continued partnership with the City of Philadelphia to make that happen and ensure that World Cup 2026 is a success that we believe it can be. Thank you for this time.

(Applause.)

MS. ALLEN: Good afternoon, Chairman Thomas and members of the Committee. My name is Nicole Allen. I am the Chief Operating Officer for Welcome America, Inc. I'm really pleased to be here today to be able to share more about our planning for 2026.

Welcome America, Inc. is a nearly 35-year-old public-private partnership with the City of Philadelphia, with a mission to enhance the resident and visitor experience by planning and

producing citywide celebrations, including the annual Wawa Welcome America Festival and the City of Philadelphia's Holiday Tree Lighting Celebration.

Each year we produce events that generate positive economic impact to the local economy and increase awareness of Philadelphia as a global destination. As the organization that plans and delivers the City's official Independence festival, we have been thinking and planning for 2026 and the opportunity to amplify the impact of our festival.

By way of background, the Wawa Welcome America Festival takes place between Juneteenth and July 4th every year, connecting the two most significant moments of freedom and independence in our nation's history and provides 16 continuous days of free and family-

friendly programming for Philadelphians and visitors alike.

While the schedule changes each year to keep it fresh and responsive to current events, our signature programs have come to include the Juneteenth Block Party with the African American Museum, Concilio's Hispanic Fiesta, Wawa Hoagie Day, Avenue of the Arts Block Party with Ensemble Philly, Concerts on Independence, including Gospel on Independence, Kidchella with Smith Memorial Playground, Black Music Month Celebration, Red, White and Blue To Do with Historic Philadelphia, free museums and of course our July 4th event Celebration of Freedom on Independence Hall, the Salute to Independence Parade and the July 4th concert and fireworks.

To mark the Semiquincentennial in 2026, we are

excited to continue our longstanding partnerships with many of the organizations here today to deliver a festival featuring larger global talent, bigger activations and of course, fireworks.

You mentioned the African American Museum. Just to note that this will be their 50th anniversary in 2026, and that takes place on Juneteenth. So we're really excited about that opportunity to celebrate with them.

We believe that our festival will be the single opportunity for Philadelphians to create lasting memories of the significant milestone of the Semiquincentennial and to show the half a million visitors in town for FIFA World Cup what Philadelphia has to offer.

We continue to develop our plans for the 2026 festival so

I'm not going to be able to break any news today. We're not telling you a headliner. I can say that thanks to a small group of dedicated corporate sponsors that have agreed to increase the sponsorship dollars in 2026 we are making slow progress towards creating the largest and safest Wawa Welcome America Festival in our City's history.

However, that cannot be accomplished without public sector making the same funding commitment. Public funding is critical to ensuring that we deliver the July 4th celebration that Philadelphians are expecting. If Philadelphia is going to be the epicenter of our nation's celebration, then the funding allocated to Wawa Welcome America will need to reflect that, and that starts with returning the concert to Eakins Oval where it

lived for years.

Due to pandemic funding cuts and enhanced security requirements, we were forced to shrink the concert footprint in 2022. However, we know that as it currently stands that footprint cannot hold the anticipated crowds for what we are hoping will be the largest concert, and especially with the level of talent that our city is going to expect in 2026. We will need increased City funding to ensure that we can move the concert back to Eakins Oval not just in 2026 but also in 2025 as a dress rehearsal.

While our request for funding will be significant, we know the return on investment will be worth it, not just because of the opportunity to have a world class concert but also because of the economic impact that our

festival as a whole has on the local economy and community.

In 2024, the breakdown of our direct spending on artists and small businesses as part of the festival was 57 percent of Philadelphia-based artists and businesses were engaged -- or artists and businesses, 57 percent were from Philadelphia, 76 percent was with minority-owned businesses and artists of color, and 45 percent were women-owned businesses and women.

Further, our commitment to creating free opportunities for small businesses to connect with our audiences ensured that more than 40 small businesses participated in our Free Vendor program. All of the businesses classified as either local, minority or woman-owned with 70 percent identifying as all three.

Additionally as part of the festival, we gave away over 20,000 pounds of healthy snacks through a partnership with sharing access; 30,000 free hoagies on Wawa Hoagie Day; and thousands of dollars of free treats throughout the festival. We are proud of this track record and we are committed to expanding these results exponentially in 2026 with bigger events and larger audiences.

Finally, in addition to Wawa Welcome America we also look forward to producing the biggest city of Philadelphia Tree Lighting Celebration and expanding our new Celebrate Philadelphia When We All Vote event series as well as collaborating with America250PA on the Commonwealth concert series designed to engage our entire Commonwealth between Memorial Day and July 4th.

In conclusion, thank you to City Council for your decades-long partnership and continued commitment to Welcome America. With the proper resources, we look forward to delivering Philadelphia's greatest July 4th celebration in our nation's 250-year history.

COUNCILMAN THOMAS:

Thank you all for your testimony. I think that you guys gave us some phenomenal information, some important data and a lot of numbers to think about.

Just one question from me and you could be brief. How much money would you want to see from the City and from the state as we prepare for 2026? I know a number of you advocated for funding for your individual organizations, but when we're talking about the City and the state putting up money

to prepare for 2026 what do you think would be a credible number from the City and a quality number from the state?

If you don't know, that's okay. I'm going to ask the other panels as well too. So if you want to punt it to another panel, I know somebody who will have an answer but I'm curious to hear from you.

MS. KANE: I don't want to speak -- there are so many different organizations that are making, I think, extraordinary plans, small-, medium-, large-sized. And certainly, I think one of the reasons that we, Philadelphia Soccer 2026, pulled out our economic impact is because of just how large and significant it is.

So I don't necessarily want to speak to what the overall

number needs to be because I think it -- I don't want to say it fluctuates, but I think it really has to be looked at holistically. We've had conversations with the City and also with the state.

I think that -- and again, I don't want to get ahead of the Commonwealth in this or the Administration or City Council, but I do think -- I mean, obviously Councilmember Thomas, a billion dollar number would be delightful and I think we could all be on board for that. But I do think probably I would say it's probably north in total between the City and the state I think it is north of $100 million to be able to deliver what this is or what the hope is from all of the different organizations that are coming forward. And certainly, I speak as probably the largest organization

at the table right now in addition to Welcome America.

MS. ALLEN WHITE: Yes. Well, we are a standing line item and the budget is ready. And so, we would be looking from the City to probably double that, if not more, plus what we receive from the state, which would -- as our funding sponsor, as our corporate sponsors have done to double what they typically give in a regular year.

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Thank you. I just think that we're trying to get a picture of what from our perspective we should be looking at in next year's budget as well as look at what this partnership with our folks in Harrisburg will look like as it relates to advocacy as well there. So you all are the experts, and it's important that we hear numbers

from you.

Go ahead please.

MS. KANE: The only other thing I would add is that currently we don't have a good sense of if there will be any commitments from the federal government. Philadelphia Soccer 2026 is actively engaged at the federal level as we are at the state and the local level.

We are engaged with all 11 United States host cities because it is a national event. So obviously, we're in a period of transition with administrations. I will say that currently there is no NSSE designation to World Cup, so that could change. And I think understanding what the federal overlay or federal plans related to July 4th could impact that. So there are some things that may come later in these conversations, but

just those federal conversations are happening as well.

COUNCILMAN THOMAS:

Thank you.

Are there any questions from members of the Committee?

Chair recognizes Councilmember Landau, then Councilmember Lozada.

COUNCILWOMAN LANDAU:

Real quick, can you explain what that acronym was you just used?

MS. KANE: Oh, sure. NSSE is the National Security Special Event designation. So the Pope's visit in 2015 would be an example of that where there is federal funding committed to safety and security that comes forward.

Currently, I think that there is no NSSE designation related to World Cup. Geopolitical activities certainly could impact that. And again, I think

understanding what the enormity of July 4th and what all the plannings are, I mean certainly if Congressman Boyle's, you know, joint session of Congress at Independence Hall comes forward, that could certainly impact something like that.

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Councilmember Lozada.

COUNCILWOMAN LOZADA: Very quickly. We've heard that SEPTA is increasing rates and cutting some routes. What has your conversation been with SEPTA as it relates to infrastructure and transportation capacity to ensure that the visitor experience is a good one and a safe one?

MS. KANE: Absolutely, it's a great question. And SEPTA is an essential partner to Philadelphia Soccer 2026 as I'm sure it's to Welcome America and to

conventioneers that will come in and the Major League Baseball All Star Game.

We are in active conversations with SEPTA around the needs for the visitor experience, but also the resident -- maintaining the resident experience during that. It's not let's improve it for just this six-week period, but let's ensure that we're looking at things as they're moving forward.

Obviously the wayfinding system that SEPTA has in place should be fully implemented by 2026 which will be, I think, an important part of helping visitors to move through the city. I think that is important. We continue to have, I think, robust conversations around safety, cleanliness, security.

The Broad Street Subway

Line is going to be absolutely essential to the movement of fans to and from the stadium complex. I would say operationally we have incredible confidence in SEPTA to be able to move fans to and from the stadium complex. They do it very well for 82 home games of the Phillies and the Philadelphia Eagles and for all events at the Wells Fargo Center. So we know that operationally they can do it.

We're really trying to focus on how we can enhance that experience of SEPTA, and I think part of that is going to be ongoing. But I also want to say that the Regional Rail Line is going to play an important role of moving people to and from Jefferson Station as well as 30th Street and Suburban as people come in.

The interface with Amtrak is an ongoing conversation.

So we are really trying to look at this holistically as well as related to Lemon Hill, examine how shuttle systems and how we can really kind of create something that might be very different, again complementary working with Wawa Welcome America, working with MLB, working with ArtPhilly, making sure that we're not looking at these as siloed events but how we can really move people to experience all that we have to offer.

SEPTA is critical. We certainly continue to advocate for funding at the state level for SEPTA, and we will continue to work closely with them to really try to deliver the best possible experience. Market-Frankford Line will also be critical to this and as well trolleys. So again, as we're working closely with the City, the Office of Special Events

and OTIS to really look at how it all will come together to make that happen.

COUNCILMAN THOMAS:

Thank you.

Chair recognizes Councilmember Young.

COUNCILMAN YOUNG: Thank you, Chairman.

And, Meg, you alluded to this, but can -- this is a question I want to ask all the other panels as well. But just to get your perspective, can you tell us I guess what are your organizations doing to market the cultural experiences that our neighborhoods have to offer to the visitors who are coming to Philly who may want to seek that authentic Philadelphia experience?

MS. KANE: Absolutely. So ours will be twofold. One of the -- the meeting that I left down

at Lincoln Financial Field is very much focused on the engagement of commercial activations around the stadium but also conversations around the FIFA Fan Festival. And one of the things that we will be looking to do is to ensure that there is a uniquely Philadelphia flavor to FIFA Fan Festival, and that does not just mean cheesesteaks and soft pretzels and water ice, although I'm sure that they will make an appearance.

But we know really trying to make sure that we are being able to activate when we talk about a 40-day fan festival and having entertainment and things that happen in between matches, the idea of how we can integrate local vendors, how we can ensure that specifically again when we know the nations that will be coming here, how we can tap into the authentic

cuisine that they will seek out and bring that into Fan Festival, but also work with Visit Philadelphia to be able to promote those neighborhoods where there are opportunities for a gathering, whether it's food and other arts and culture that would be of interest that we are pushing out to that.

We're also learning a lot right now about what FIFA's app will be. So each of the host cities will interface through a unified app that FIFA will push out. And so, part of that is going to be how we are able to promote destinations and things for people to do in neighborhoods, and we will be able to inform that. So again, working closely with Visit Philadelphia to really bring that forward is going to be critically important.

Obviously, and I've said this on many occasions, if we are lucky enough potentially to have Brazil come in a group stage match, I have no doubt that Castor Avenue might be shut down for a period of time given the Brazilian population. But I also know that South Street could be shut down for Brauhaus Schmitz when Germany is playing.

And so, we also see incredible opportunity. And having met with Africatown, there is incredible excitement around the tournament. The expansion of the tournament from 32 to 48 teams is really critical because it is likely that there will be countries that have never qualified for World Cup before that will qualify.

So again, a lot of -- I hate to say it continues to be something that we look out for, but

I think a lot of specificity that you're seeking in how we will activate will come after we have the draw in December '25.

COUNCILMAN YOUNG: Thank you.

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Thank you all for your testimony. It's very much appreciated. Thank you all.

MS. KANE: Thank you.

MS. ALLEN WHITE: Thank you.

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Thank you for your advocacy as well too.

Will the Clerk please call the next panel to come testify.

THE CLERK: We will now hear from Danielle DiLeo Kim; Jonathan Burton; Patricia Wilson Aden and Lauren Swartz.

(Witnesses approached

Witness table.)

COUNCILMAN THOMAS:

While we're waiting for this panel to come up, I did want to just again take a moment to thank everybody for being here and being part of such an important conversation and thank you for all of the experts who've been communicating thus far. This has been a great dialogue and great information.

We will do this panel like we did the last panel. We'll allow you to say your name and start with the testimony. We'll allow you each to go consecutively. And then afterwards, we'll open it up for any questions that members of the Committee may have.

So if you can start, you can state your name for the record and begin your testimony.

MS. DiLEO KIM: thank

you. Good afternoon, Councilmembers. I'd like to thank the Committee and Chairman Thomas for convening today's hearing and drawing attention to the importance of 2026. I'm Danielle DiLeo Kim, President and CEO of Philadelphia250, the nonprofit dedicated to activating, celebrating and transforming our neighborhoods for the 250th.

American independence was declared nearly 250 years ago just a few hundred feet from where we are now. You might think that the 250th is a political thing. It's actually a people thing. And because the 250th is about engaging our citizens in democracy, Philadelphia250 has a bold act, a bold plan to act, a plan to activate our resident civic involvement, celebrate our diverse neighborhoods in every City Council

District and transform our city with local investments.

This place-based approach helps advance Mayor Parker's vision to build a safer, cleaner, greener Philadelphia where prosperity reaches every corner of our city. Knowing that this monumental opportunity would be upon us in 2026, the Philadelphia team has been planning and collaborating for years with cultural organizations, academic institutions, historical sites and residents.

For us, the 250th has already begun. For example, our Community Advisory Committee, just announced last week, is made up of 30 civic leaders from every City Council and ensures that residents' voices will be heard. Six co-chairs representing ACANA, Esperanza, Johnson House, North,

Broad Renaissance, PhillyBOLT and We Love Philly lead the diverse committee.

Together these three dozen citizens are Philadelphia's 250th changemakers and they are from our neighborhoods. The 250th matters in Philadelphia. And as Meg Kane mentioned earlier, we want to make sure that 2026 doesn't happen to us, but happens by and for all of us.

In 2024 alone, we've spoke to more than 1300 people, attended 10 community festivals out in the neighborhoods, hosted two dozen workshops and conversations in town halls with partners such as the Welcoming Center, Resolve Philly and Mural Arts to listen and understand what the 250th means to our citizens.

We have partners developing impact legacy projects,

Special Olympics of Pennsylvania, Smith Memorial Playhouse, Habitat for Humanity and our market cultural tours in the last six months, our Women's Committee has grown to 155 members strong. The committee has pledged to fund a legacy project that advances financial independence and economic empowerment for Philadelphia women. The energy is building. The people of Philadelphia are engaged, and we are in service to them as we are able.

Last week we announced a dozen culturally diverse neighborhood gateways that will serve as places for 250th celebrations in 2026. They are Africatown, Belmont Mansion, Centro de Oro, Chinatown, 52nd Street, Fox Chase, Central Germantown, Mayfair, Ninth Street Market, North Broad Street and Uptown Ogontz Avenue.

These gateways represent communities that have vibrant cultural traditions, strong businesses and committed local leadership like those of us -- like those from our CAC. The partnerships we are building now and will continue to develop, and these partnerships will help develop the established neighborhood celebrations. Events that you already love and a few new ones will be part of the 250th calendar of events in the summer of 2026.

Philadelphians and the many visitors that are here can explore the city in new and unexpected ways. We are not parachuting in. Each celebration will reflect the local communities culture and sense of place and our role will be designed side-by-side with community partners.

The gateway activities have an opportunity to create jobs, support local businesses and strengthen cultural and community infrastructure. Additionally, to have lasting impact we have a partnership with the Enterprise Center to provide grants from private and public investors to diverse businesses along these same corridors.

The gateways change the narrative about how and where to celebrate American history, and they bring us the hope, connection and civic cultural pride that we all need right now. People are already engaged in the 250th and they are hopeful about what is to come.

Philadelphia250's Board of Directors led by former Governor and Mayor Ed Rendell and I are very grateful for the financial support

we received from corporate and philanthropic supporters and of course the City over the last few years. While it has helped sustain our outreach and planning, more funds are needed to deliver the actual celebrations and investment impacts in 2026.

Without significant additional funding, these community-supported neighborhood gateway celebrations will not happen. Today I'm asking you, our public officials, to consider investing in Philadelphia250 and our communities. Help realize the gateways and create real civic, cultural and economic opportunities in our neighborhoods, in the birthplace of American democracy with the 250th and beyond. Thank you.

MR. BURTON: Good afternoon, members of City Council.

Thank you for taking the time today. My name is Jonathan Burton, and I'm the Director of Development for the Independence Historical Trust, the nonprofit philanthropic partner of the National Parks of Philadelphia, most notably Independence National Historical Park.

I'm honored to speak with you today about the critical role our national park plays in Philadelphia's cultural tourism industry and to share our vision in supporting our national parks for our nation's upcoming 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence.

Independence National Historical Park is the most iconic cultural park in the National Parks Service System, and a UNESCO world heritage site right here in our backyard. As we approach 2026,

Philadelphia's National Park will take center stage drawing millions of visitors from across the globe.

These visitors come not only to see where American history started but also to experience Philadelphia's unique spirit and story. To prepare for this milestone anniversary, we at the Independence Historical Trust have been working on several key legacy projects that will enhance the National Park's offerings and to ensure our city shines on the international stage in 2026.

One of the largest undertakings has been the restoration of the First Bank of the United States. This national historic landmark building, an iconic symbol of our early financial independence, has long needed revitalization. The Trust raised over $4 million towards its

rehabilitation, which then in turn unlocked $30 million in federal funding from the Great American Outdoors Act to restore the building and to ensure that First Bank will be ready to reopen and welcome the world in 2026.

Additionally, another exciting project is the reimagining of the Benjamin Rush Garden at 3rd and Walnut Streets. This $2 million project was made possible by the independence Historical Trust. The Garden now houses the Bicentennial Bell gifted to America by Queen Elizabeth II in 1976. The Bell assembled our friendship between the U.S. and the U.K. will add a new layer of historical significance in our cityscape. This is a project that we hope will inspire reflection and unity, connecting past and present in an urban green space for all to enjoy.

Our national parks are a key economic driver for our city. In 2023, 3 million park visitors spent an estimated $204 million in local gateway regions while visiting Independence Park. These expenditures supported a total of 2,780 jobs, $125 million in labor income, $194 million in value added, and $323 million in economic output and local gateway economy surrounding the park.

Our national parks of Philadelphia boost the local economy and benefit residents and businesses throughout the city. Philadelphia's national parks are a powerful economic engine and a cultural anchor, bringing people together, fostering local pride and inspiring future generations.

The National Park Service has invested millions of dollars in preparing the park for

the Semiquincentennial, but there are still significant needs. This is why we are asking for the City of Philadelphia's support. I'll say it again, we're asking for the City's financial support.

For instance, Independence Hall, one of the most iconic buildings in our country urgently needs a fresh coat of paint and wood repair before 2026. Due to federal budget constraints however, the earliest federal funding could be available in 2028. Funding from the City of Philadelphia in a timely manner we can get this essential job done next year. I ask for your help to ensure that Independence Hall, a Philadelphia treasure, is ready for this historic moment.

Additionally, we see a tremendous opportunity to show our City support for our national parks

by funding key park positions to help keep the park clean, green, safe and open to visitors, especially for key functions like public restrooms. This is a unique moment in history when our city will be under the international spotlight and we should be ready to welcome the world with open doors. So let's open the dialogue about the needs of Philadelphia's national parks and how the City can support this invaluable resource.

As you know, the City of Philadelphia still owns Independence Hall and the Liberty Bell. While the National Park Service has been a dedicated steward for decades, the time is now for Philadelphia to show its commitment by supporting the National Park Service through the Independence Historical Trust. Thank you.

MS. WILSON ADEN: Good afternoon. My name is Patricia Wilson Aden, and I am the President and CEO of the Greater Philadelphia Cultural Alliance. I'm grateful for this opportunity to participate in this hearing this afternoon.

The Cultural Alliance was founded in 1972 in anticipation of the Bicentennial celebration in 1976. Ever since, we have been dedicated to leading, strengthening and amplifying the voices of our region's cultural community. Ahead of the Bicentennial, Philadelphia made significant investments in its cultural infrastructure.

Now, as we look forward to the Semiquincentennial, Philadelphia has the opportunity, and I would say the weighty responsibility, to present experiences that are relevant to our times that reflect current

perspectives and that will optimize this unique opportunity for the long-term good of our city and its residents.

No other sector is better-suited to respond to this challenge than the cultural sector. It is our events, our destinations that will distinguish Philadelphia from Boston, New York and other cities that some have called our competition.

I want to thank Chair Thomas for inviting us to participate in this hearing and ensuring that the cultural community has a seat at the table. Our iconic institutions, community-based organizations and innovative artists are ready to showcase who we are as a city, so that 2026 isn't the culmination of this unmatched opportunity, but it is instead a catapult that propels

Philadelphia to new heights on the global stage.

Together the Philadelphia region's creative economy generates $3.3 billion and employs 24,000 people. The cultural sector's workforce and the vendors we employ represents the region's demographic diversity. 2026 offers undeniable potential for the growth of the cultural workforce for creative entrepreneurs to grow their businesses and for artists to grow their practices so that they can live and thrive in our city.

If we can generate 3.3 billion in economic impact post-pandemic, just imagine what we can do if public investment commensurate with our potential impact is made available to the cultural sector. A consortium of local foundations has already made

a multi-million dollar investment in 2026. Corporate partners like Target have already readily recognized the opportunity to meet both their philanthropic and marketing objectives.

Regrettably, their enthusiasm has been dampened by a lack of public dollars to match their potential investments in arts and culture for 2026. We cannot miss this opportunity to bring visitors to America's only world heritage city, to celebrate the Semiquincentennial.

We must seize this moment to encourage visitors to go beyond Center City to discover neighborhoods that have been underexplored and uncelebrated. 2026 offers the potential to showcase the cultural institutions that make our city thrive and to create new experiences that promote

the rich heritage found in our neighborhoods. But the lack of funding is holding many organizations back.

In a survey distributed by ArtPhilly and with the participation of over 370 organizations and individuals, 70 percent of the respondents indicated that funding for 2026 activities was a challenge. The majority of these organizations, many of them neighborhood-based, said that their plans could be realized with $5,000 to $50,000 in funding.

The majority of individual respondents, artists and creative entrepreneurs, said they could accomplish their plans with less than $10,000 in funding. And, yes, some large scale and more complex proposals deserve and will require millions of dollars in

funding.

So let's be clear about the bottom line. Philadelphia could generate billions of dollars in economic impact, generate hundreds of jobs and help leverage millions of dollars for hotel and hospitality industries with a strategic investment to support the creative sector.

Philadelphia's cultural community stands ready to participate in 2026 but we can't overstate the need to act with urgency. Planning stage productions, heritage tours, exhibits, community events, murals and performances take time, coordination and money.

We urge City Council and the Parker administration to give 2026 the timely support required for the success of the cultural community's input. Through our

collaboration in cross-sector engagement and with public dollars to match philanthropic funding in corporate investments, Philadelphia can realize the full potential of 2026 and leverage that success for 2027 and beyond. Thank you.

(Applause.)

MS. SWARTZ: Thank you, Chair Thomas and to the Committee for the opportunity to speak to you today and talk about this momentous occasion for our city. My name is Lauren Swartz and I serve as the President and CEO of the World Affairs Council of Philadelphia. We are the region's largest and longest-running international nonprofit, opening doors between Philadelphia and the world.

From powerful speaker events, international exchanges to youth education, professional development and curated travel

programs, World Affairs Council is where continents, cultures and ideas connect. Always non-partisan and apolitical, we're celebrating 75 years.

We're well-known for hosting the world's diplomats, leaders, ambassadors and people shaping the world that we all live in together. In partnership with the U.S. State Department, we host leaders from over 125 countries to our city every year. That program alone generates over $1 million in positive economic impact for our city.

We train our local workforce every year on how to do business better across countries and cultures. We also are in a 65-year partnership with the City of Philadelphia to manage our sister city program and provide diplomatic support to our local

government. We travel the world by offering 30 international tours and study tours each year annually, and proudly we work with over 3,000 middle and high school students across our region, serving 100 area schools, making sure our youngest Philadelphians have access to the world and education and exchange programs.

We do this work not because connecting our city to the world is nice to do, but it is a need to do. International engagement is critical for the success of our city today and tomorrow. We know that over 96 percent of the world's population lives outside of the United States. Only .002 percent of the world's population is in Philadelphia. 74 percent of the world's economic growth is outside of the United States. Over 350,000 jobs across

our Commonwealth are supported by international companies that have chosen to call our Commonwealth their home.

We heard many other statistics from our panelists here today to talk about the impact we know now about international engagement. For Philadelphia to thrive and reach its full and future potential, we must engage and do so successfully and strategically with the world's economies, travelers, investors and partners.

It's well-known in this room and after a few hours of our enthusiastic testimony how much opportunity is before us. My message to you is how we welcome the world in 2026 is critical to our long-term success and to create long-term access to international engagement.

That is where the World Affairs Council of Philadelphia comes in. We are committing to creating success for international engagements and engaging our local residents in this opportunity, and preventing a few international incidents along the way.

In 2026, World Affairs Council will play three main roles to make sure that this works: First, we will provide curated cultural diplomacy training to equip our frontline workers, our key hosts and our volunteers with the critical skills that they will need to welcome the world to our city.

These trainings will empower Philadelphia to host exceptionally and authentically, with cross-cultural sensitivity skills such as greetings, body languages, gender roles, dress,

gifts, cultural expectations, cross-cultural norms and more.

Second, we will develop and deploy our young people in a cohort of high school youth ambassadors to make sure that our youngest leaders -- our youngest Philadelphians have a role to play when we welcome the world. These students will receive cultural diplomacy training of course but also training on volunteerism, civics and in a little bit of our history to understand why Philadelphia has the world's eyes on it in this moment.

In 2026 these students will serve as general ambassadors at certainly World Affairs Council events but, more importantly, at the events you've heard about all around the world. They will be deployed throughout the city to help welcome and engage our

visitors, to help welcome the diplomats and envoys and the six to eight heads of state we expect at each World Cup game. We will track and deploy their intercultural skills, their immigrant excellence, their language skills to make sure we put Philly's best foot forward.

Thirdly, we will serve as the lead private sector coordinator for high-level visits, invitations and inquiries from diplomats, delegations and envoys from abroad. As part of that, I've been asked to chair the International Working Group as part of Philadelphia Soccer 2026.

This is what's critical, how we welcome the world, being ready to prioritize, host, gift, bank, and sometimes politely and strategically decline offers and opportunities -- I see you there -- from our international guests

knocking at our door, as they do so every day right now and will do so in multiples in 2026, is critical to how the world sees our city, to make sure that our long-term foreign affairs brand and reputation not only strengthens but stays strong beyond 2026 so we can drive future international economic inbound investment, direct flights, trade, air service and exchange and more to Philadelphia as we welcome the world back home.

How we welcome the world is our path to determine. And the World Affairs Council is committed to being that partner, as we've been committed to the city in our international engagement for 75 years. As my colleagues have said, partnering with the City and the state and the federal government to make sure that the financial support is there to deploy

successfully and to create these tools in our toolbox that will thrive far beyond 2026 is our offer and our opportunity to work together here today. Thank you.

(Applause.)

COUNCILMAN THOMAS:

Thank you so much for all of that amazing testimony and thank you for all the work that you're doing similar to the other panels. This organizing effort that's already taking place has been amazing.

I'll start with the same question I asked them. So what's the number that you all would like to see? Not for your individual organizations, but what's the number that you would like to see as a whole as it relates to the City and the state investing in 2026? Anybody just take maybe 15 seconds to give me what you think that number should be coming from

City and state government on behalf of the arts and culture sector.

MS. WILSON ADEN: I've heard 30 million stated. We will not turn that down, but let's approach this strategically. The Greater Philadelphia cultural line stands ready to convene a meeting so that we can fold all of these organizations that have their individual ask and come up with the collective ask that we can then share with you.

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Mr. Newmuis, did you hear that? Somebody just volunteered to do a little bit of work for us. So I'm going to go ahead on the record and take you up on that offer, because if that can be done before we move into next year's negotiations, I think it will help us get a visualization of how much money we should spend.

I think the last panel said north of $100 million. And I can tell you from the perspective of government, the more you can help us out the better. So if you would be willing to take on that charge, I know myself and other members of Council will definitely appreciate it. I can't speak on behalf of the Admin, but the more research that's done leading to 2026, the better off we'll be.

My shameless plug before I open it up to the members of the Committee is that the World Affairs of Council said that you're going to be looking for high school students, so please make sure you include the Education Committee on City Council in the midst of your search --

MS. SWARTZ: Absolutely.

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: -- because we want to maybe host some

phenomenal events that can put us in a position to allow young people to be a part of that conversation. So thank you all for the amazing information.

Are there any questions from members of the -- Chair recognizes Councilmember Young.

COUNCILMAN YOUNG: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Just a segue to my question. Some of you all talked about -- so this type of event is once in a lifetime. I wasn't born in 1976 to see that event, and the next one will be in, you know, I'll be 90 for the next one, right, so it's once in a lifetime.

So what are you all doing to engage our young people, right, to restore some of that civic pride that they may have, not have or that we've lost in order to kind of shape their futures and

then put them on the path in the right direction?

So if you can just briefly touch on it, how you all will incorporate the young people in our city in some of the 250 celebration?

MS. SWARTZ: In addition to the Youth Ambassador Program that we will launch in 2026 --

COUNCILMAN YOUNG: Yes.

MS. SWART: -- will hopefully sustain into the future. We do about 40 different youth education programs in the city every year, as I know your office has helped host those. We're sending our young people on high school student exchanges to our sister cities. We're doing model Senate, model United Nations (inaudible) and out-of-school time and virtual programs as well.

And as we get closer and

closer to the anniversary, we're leaving topics that are more closely aligned to what their experience will be. Like yourself they weren't born in 1976 and they might be retired by the time the next big opportunity happens, so we're making sure through our current toolbox is that they have access and an understanding of this monumental moment in their history as well.

COUNCILMAN YOUNG: Thank you.

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Thank you.

Chair recognizes Councilmember Lozada.

COUNCILWOMAN LOZADA: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

In your testimony I hear a lot about the importance of preserving cultural awareness and communities. In your testimony in

Philadelphia250's testimony, I couldn't help but notice that you mentioned many neighborhood gateways or cultural neighborhoods, but did not have one of the most significant cultural organizations in the Latino community which is El Centro de Oro, and I find it ironic that it wasn't mentioned because it is in that Fairhill, Kensington neighborhood. Was that done strategically or was that an oversight?

MS. DiLEO KIM: I believe I did mention Centro de Oro. It is one of the gateways.

COUNCILWOMAN LOZADA: I didn't hear it. I'm sorry if you did.

MS. DiLEO KIM: It is definitely one of our gateways that we mentioned. That will be one of the centers for celebration and recognition.

COUNCILWOMAN LOZADA: Just wanted to make sure. Thank you.

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: We appreciate your advocacy, Councilwoman.

Councilmember Landau had to go but she asked me to ask on her behalf, can we repurpose the circular Visitors building in Love Park to be a place where our millions of visitors can help make mural panels through Mural Arts Color Me Back program? And is there a plan for Mural programming for the 250th anniversary celebration?

MS. WILSON ADEN: I --

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Please.

MS. WILSON ADEN: I will let others answer the question about the Welcome Center, but I do know that one of the proposals from

the Mural Arts program was an ambitious plan to present large scale murals at our gateways, underpasses and overpasses.

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Yep.

MS. WILSON ADEN: It is a way to welcome our visitors and help them move to the city, always in recognition of what distinguishes Philadelphia as the world's largest outdoor gallery.

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: And, Mr. Newmuis, this is also a way to get rid of the graffiti that people see when you're driving to the city as well too. So while I'm not quite sure where this ranks in the planning of things, but one of the things that we should consider is the beautification of our city and making sure that when people enter our city and travel through our city that we're displaying our best self, we have our best outfits on,

and that probably could mean some type of murals or some type of artwork to cover up some of the things that we see as it relates to our highways, expressways and things of that capacity. So thank you for that. Councilmember Landau, thank you for that question even in your absence.

I believe that's it for this panel. I want to say thank you all for your testimony but, more importantly, thank you for the coordination and the work that you're doing already. And as government, we know we have to step it up a little bit so thank you all.

Mr. Maynard, will you please call the final panel of today's hearing.

THE CLERK: Finally, we'll hear from Visit Philadelphia, Angela Val and the Philadelphia

Visitor Center Corporation, Kathryn Ott.

(Witnesses approached Witness table.)

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: So while this panel is coming up, I would like to take a moment to say thank you to our Council President, our Council President Kenyatta Johnson. He's not here today, but the reason I'm thanking him is because he has pushed this body, this legislative branch to do more remote hearings, to do more things in neighborhoods and in communities. And if you couldn't think of a better theme for a remote hearing than to be here to talk about this issue, yeah, this is amazing.

So thank you to the Council President. John Fenton, thank you as well. To the entire Tech team, to our amazing

stenographer and everybody who makes these remote hearings possible, I just want to say thank you so much. This is an amazing conversation, but it couldn't happen without you all.

I'm just here holding the mic asking questions. The reality is that you all make it happen. I also want to say thank you to my team, Team Thomas as well, for putting together and coordinating this conversation.

(Applause.)

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: I think I know how to say the word Quincentennial now, so I took notes from Congressman Boyle that you can't ask for money until you know how to say Quincentennial. So I've been up here practicing, and I almost got it down pat.

As we look to close out today's panel, I just want to

especially say thank you to both of the folks that's up here right now. I know I thanked Kathryn a little earlier for the great work that she does and for meeting and pushing and advocating.

But I especially want to thank Angela. Angela, if you don't know, has been one of the organizers, one of the faces, one of the people who's been sounding the alarm and bringing people together for some time. And typically like a lot of amazing people do, she's been doing it with no reward, with no thank you. Nobody's giving her a bonus or extra money for the time that she's been putting in to be able to make some of the things that's happened in the private sector come to play. And more importantly, she's done it with a smile. She's done it with grace. She's been one of those

people who, behind the scenes, has had that Ella Baker spirit and really just love Philadelphia and been figuring out how do we move our city forward.

So, Angela, if no one has told you, please let me tell you thank you so much for all you've been doing.

(Applause.)

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: So you both know how this goes. State your name for the record. You may begin with your testimony and again thank you.

MS. VAL: I'm the President and CEO of Visit Philadelphia. Good afternoon, Councilmembers, and thank you for having me today. I would like to extend a special thank you to Chairman Thomas for understanding the importance of this moment in front of us in calling this

hearing.

My name is Angela Val and I'm the President and CEO of Visit Philadelphia, the official destination marketing organization for the five county region. Our dedicated staff works tirelessly to promote the city, build Philadelphia's brand and, most importantly, boost the local economy through visitor spending.

We stand at a defining moment in Philadelphia's history. The 250th anniversary of our nation's founding presents an unparalleled opportunity to not only showcase our city to the world but to leverage this global spotlight into the future, economic growth and investment.

As the birthplace of America and modern democracy, Philadelphia is uniquely positioned to be the epicenter of the 250th

celebrations. However, without significant funding from both the City and the state, we risk missing the chance to shine on the world stage.

This is our opportunity to lose if we don't embrace our role as the host city for this Semiquincentennial, another city will. I'm going to just go off script for a moment because you've heard today from many of our partners and my colleagues about the need for funding, competition and what big and small events will happen in the downtown area and in the neighborhoods.

But what I really want to get across today is that in this tourism business, and I've had the privilege of working both at Visit Philadelphia and the Philadelphia Convention and Visitors Bureau, that when we decide to bid on a

large event, whether that is RNC for 4 days or World Cup for 40, we do not take it lightly. We understand both the opportunity and the challenge it poses.

We are a city which I love that as, Councilwoman Lozada, you pointed out quite well. We are a city with lots of challenges that we have to address. But these large events, these moments also give us the opportunity to not just look at that one year, 2026, but to look beyond that for what it can do for us in the future.

And I'm going to give you an example of that today. Atlanta, Georgia, which is a World Cup city 28 years ago was a small, sleepy southern city. In 1996 they decided to host the Olympics. At that time, Greater Atlanta's population was 2 million. Today it is 5.2 million people.

They took that money, and I think this speaks directly to your point, the money that we heard that's going to be our economic impact from World Cup, I believe Meg said 770 million projected, right, what we do with that money is why we are sitting here today. How will we be intentional about what that money does for us in Philadelphia's future.

I'll give you some examples about how Atlanta decided to spend that money. Atlanta expanded their airport. It is one of the largest -- it is the largest airport in the United States. It is the hub to Delta. They expanded their public transportation lines and their roads and highways, connecting their region to their downtown area.

Their problem today, traffic, because they've done so

well. They have a legacy park that is for their community. That is the Centennial Olympic Park, 21 acres of green space for their community and for conventions and people who visit it.

They also have today 16 of the Fortune 500 companies headquartered in Atlanta. They have five professional sports teams. I mean, look, we got that, but they had to work for it. We've always had it. But today, what are they doing for 2026? They are establishing the Beltline that they have been working on for years. It will be completed in 2026.

2026 is not the end. It is the beginning point of what could be, and this is our opportunity to decide who we are as a city and what it is we will do with this opportunity. I want to thank you very much for this

hearing.

(Applause.)

MS. OTT LOVELL: I'm going to spare most of my remarks as well. We're over time, and I have a big fat ditto to everything that was said because so much of it was said, it needed to be said and it was said so well.

But I do want to start out with some thanks, first and foremost, to all of these organizations sitting behind me. You know, Councilman Thomas, your remarks about Angela were so spot-on. Angela has been an incredible champion of this effort, as has Gregg, as has Danielle, as has Michael, as has Jazelle, as has Meg and everybody behind us.

We have been working, some people, for almost a decade to plan for this momentous possibility for our city. And we are literally

now at where the rubber meets the road, right. This is it. So I want to start out by thanking all of those folks who have been working so hard to make this possible.

Secondly, I want to thank the philanthropic community because there was Funder --

(Applause.)

MS. OTT LOVELL: -- Collaborative 2026, the William Penn Foundation, the Connelly Foundation, Pew Charitable Trust, Neubauer, Comcast, Hamilton who came together and raised almost $15 million, right, to invest in supporting all of these efforts and helping us plan and envision and implement what's possible in 2026. So they were first money in, right, and they have been absolutely critical to helping us envision what the possibilities are.

Thirdly, I want to thank you, Councilman Thomas. I want to thank, Councilperson Lozada, Councilperson Young, Councilperson Landau for your leadership and your support because talking about this for the two-plus hours we've been sitting here today already means more than you could possibly understand.

Listening to us, hearing us and most importantly we know that your leadership in taking this information and doing what we know you will do with it is exactly where we need to be. I also want to thank Michael Newmuis and Mayor Parker and the Parker administration for their incredible support. And we know we have total confidence in you as our elected leaders to heed this call and figure out how to make this happen.

Councilman Thomas, you

mentioned just before the hearing and have talked about it a few times this idea of sounding an alarm, right. To me, it's not as much sounding an alarm as it is just really emphasizing this sense of urgency. Time is of the essence.

We are six weeks away from 2025. When you hear 2026, all of us have thought that it's so far out to the future. It is not. It is imminent, right. And I know a little bit about the City budget process. I was on the other side, right. We have one budget cycle left. We have one budget cycle left at the City and state level, right. That's it.

There has been nothing included for Philadelphia's 2026 celebrations, right, in previous City or state budgets beyond some support for the World Cup, right.

This is our moment. This is our only chance. It is right now.

Now, we are Philly. We are underdogs, right. We will do what we need to do to not let this moment pass us by. But to quote a little show that's being staged right here as I speak just across town, Just like our country, we are young, scrappy and hungry and we cannot throw away this shot. Thank you.

(Applause.)

COUNCILMAN THOMAS:

Thank you both for your testimony. But I think more importantly thank you for the relationship that you have with the members of City Council, with the Admin because again your expertise, your lived experience and your advocacy is a big part of why we're here today to have this important conversation.

I think that we're all

walking away with a lot of homework, a lot of action items, a lot of to-do lists. But before we close out today's conversation, I have to ask you the same question I asked everybody else, what's the number?

How much money do you think the City should put in and how much money do you think the state should put in to put us in a position to be as prepared as possible as we get ready for 2026? And like you said, it's only one budget left. So what's the number?

MS. VAL: May I?

MS. OTT LOVELL: Yes.

MS. VAL: This is without World Cup, but the number that we have put in which we have submitted is $23.4 million to come from the City. We would like the state to put in roughly about 28 million. The difference between

those numbers, specifically for the events around 250 is the region.

When we put in the state number, we also went with the other for surrounding counties. So you can call this 50 million together.

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: So 50 million total or just for the Arts and Culture community?

MS. VAL: This is for the marquee events for the 250th. There is an ask separate from that for the World Cup and an ask separate from that just for Arts and Culture and some of the surrounding neighborhoods that came from Danielle and from Patty.

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: So if you were a member of Council who just wasn't seeing this as a top priority or a state legislator who doesn't see this as a top priority, so you don't want to see divided pots of money when I go to the

Mayor, when Mrs. Jones and Michael go to the Mayor, what's the total number that we're asking from the Mayor for everybody, so I'm talking sports, arts and culture, visitors?

Because when we say, well, this is what we want to see for 2026 and I put together my memo, how much am I asking the City to put in for 2026?

MS. OTT LOVELL: I think it depends on how much the state puts in and how much we believe we can raise additionally from the corporate and philanthropic sector. So from that we need support as well.

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: So what if the state puts in -- don't count the private sector. What if the state puts in the 30 million that was suggested, how much should the City put in?

MS. VAL: You should at

least match it.

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: So you think that 60 million at minimum?

MS. VAL: That is -- look, that is without World Cup. World Cup is a beast.

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: That's a different conversation?

MS. VAL: That's a different conversation right there. They're talking numbers that we couldn't spend like that.

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Sure. And if I recall you all said 100 million, right? Yeah, you can't talk now. You could just give me a thumbs up.

MS. KANE: (Gestured).

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Yes, for the record 100 million was the number that they suggested. And you all are saying at least 60 without World Cup initiatives?

MS. VAL: At least 60 without World Cup for us to do what we have committed to do. That's what I would say that we would need. And that could come from a combination of both the state and the City.

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Right.

MS. VAL: Or one of y'all can give 20 and the other one give the 40.

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Right. But that doesn't -- but in your calculations you're not including the philanthropy dollars because you know that that's common and you need that to go elsewhere?

MS. VAL: That is correct. They were first money in --

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Bingo.

MS. VAL: They have some

money left, but that is not enough to fill that gap. It should also not be their burden to pay for all of this. Each of these organizations too have either reached into their own pocket or have raised money from the corporate community too. So we are not coming here with our hands open without putting some skin in the game. We're asking you to join us and put some skin in that game.

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Perfect, I think that was perfect. Thank you.

Any questions from members of the Committee for this particular panel?

COUNCILWOMAN LOZADA: I don't have a question, but I want to -- I just want to make a statement. I want to say thank you. Thank you to each of you who testified today for all of the work

that you all have done up until now, right.

I think for me what's important is to make sure that people want to continue to come back to the city that I love, right, to the city that I call home, to the city that I was born and raised in, to my neighborhood, to my community. I want my community to be able to say that the Mayor's priority was equal opportunity, equal economic opportunity for all and that that included us, right.

When you walk the community of the 7th Council District, often times they don't feel like they're included. They don't feel like they're a part of the conversation, right. And so, I want to say thank you to those of you who have included us in the conversation, who have made it a

point to make us a priority in the forefront as opposed to an afterthought.

And I want to invite all of you who have not to reach out, to have a conversation with some of those stakeholders in the arts and culture world, in the business community, in the civic associations. I invite you to have a conversation with them so that you also can see that that is a resilient district, that there are -- there are a lot of really great people and great things happening there. And that when visitors come here that they go into that neighborhood and they can see that for themselves beyond what those social media platforms say about them. So thank you so much for all that you are doing.

COUNCILMAN THOMAS:

Thank you, Councilwoman.

Chair recognizes Councilmember Loza -- Councilmember Young. I'm sorry.

COUNCILMAN YOUNG: Real quick can you just talk to us about how you're working with our regional partners to kind of market this and bring some more dollars to the city of Philadelphia?

MS. VAL: Sure. Visit Philadelphia has a responsibility not just for Philadelphia but the four surrounding counties. We have a partner in each of those counties, their CVB. We have worked with them to figure out how the celebration that happens here in Philadelphia can also be connected to those four counties.

So if you think of things like the history story, how are we saying what happens here in Philadelphia, how did that connect Valley Forge. What are we looking

at bike trails, for instance, giving people activity to do from Philadelphia that go into the counties.

I speak for my colleague, Meg Kane, that World Cup is going to be a very, very big event. Hotels will be filled out in the counties, and there is a possibility for teams and visitors to also stay in those areas. Getting people back and forth is going to be very important to us.

I always see us as a region and Philadelphia just the heart of that region. But we are in this 100 percent together and the experience should be happening not just downtown, not just in our neighborhoods but also in those four surrounding counties.

COUNCILMAN YOUNG: Thank you.

COUNCILMAN THOMAS:

Thank you. Can we give them both a round of applause?

(Applause.)

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: So we are ready to close out this hearing. Before we do, I understand that there are two organizations who asked to just make a comment on the record. I'm going to allow both organizations 60 seconds, and I mean 60 seconds or John Fenton is going to come cut you off. But, yeah, we have to get ready to go.

So we'll allow you both to have 60 seconds. State your name on the record. Say the organization that you represent, and you can give brief remarks and then we're going to have to end today's hearing.

(Witnesses approached Witness table.)

MR. YOUNG: Thank you,

Mr. Chairman, and thank you to the Committee for having allowed me to speak today. My name is Thomas Young. I'm the President, CEO of the World Trade Center Greater Philadelphia. I've been in my position for a little over a year now.

We are 501(c)(3) that help local businesses with international complexities, help identify different marketplaces and help our local businesses grow. We also help with local -- I mean, excuse me -- international investment as well, so direct investment.

The reason why I'm speaking today is because we've just recently won the bid to host our Global Business Forum in Philadelphia in 2026. It will be April 2026. And this event is where we bring over 300 World Trade

Centers from over 90 countries around the world to Philadelphia, for Philadelphia to be the host city which we highlight our city for our local businesses but also invite foreign direct investments.

These World Trade Centers will also be bringing businesses with them for business-to-business matchmaking and also investors to look at different areas for investment such as our ports. I really appreciate you having me today, and I look forward to having a more extensive conversation with you about what we're doing to prepare for this event in 2026.

We're talking to our local businesses now and giving them training in export compliance, export finance, export regulations and everything that's involved with doing business internationally.

Thank you.

COUNCILMAN THOMAS:

Thank you. Thank you for adding that to the topic of conversation.

Last but not least.

MR. MORAK: Mike Morak, Philadelphia Basketball. You know, just wanted to talk to you guys. Thank you for having us today. But just wanted to make the point of the kids that we're about to inspire, the ones that are going to pick up a ball, get on a field, get outside.

What we've done with Legendary Summer Hoops Month and really inspiring the next generation of basketball people representing over 30 different basketball organizations across Philadelphia and what we're looking to do to add in more sports into that is what we're about to do for the 2026 project as we look at the

different sports that are being incorporated and all these great people coming to the city. We want to make sure we're not forgetting the kids of who's going to be out there playing.

We've been fighting for years to make sure we're getting people outside to play and this is a great opportunity that people are going to see sports in their city and making sure that we're equipped to help support the growth of the sport.

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Thank you.

MR. THOMPSON: I'm Rahim Thompson. I'm a co-creator of Philly Legendary Summer Hoops Month and I'm also the leader of the Chosen League. 2026 is very important for us, for the youth across the city. We talk about being a city of neighborhoods, but

also a city of neighborhoods, we also are city of youth sports. And every neighborhood represents a different sport, whether it's basketball, whether it's soccer, whether it's track and field, whether it's baseball, whether it's football.

And as we enter 2026, it's very important that we give back to these communities and support these youth programs because these youth programs are the pillars of our communities. They teach them entrepreneurial skills. They teach them how to work together but, most importantly, give civic pride to these neighborhoods.

Everybody know when the neighborhood game is going on. It brings the community together regardless of gender, regardless of race, regardless of whatever your

political belief is. It brings the community together. And as we enter 2026 and the 250th-year anniversary, it's something to bring the country together as we are going through difficult times right now. Because we are built on democracy, and democracy is built on whatever your belief is, I respect it no matter if I don't believe in it myself.

So as I speak, Councilman, and I'll speak to Council, please support us. And what we're looking for is $7 million to $10 million to cover over 300 youth programs across the city, covering track and field, basketball, baseball and soccer.

(Applause.)

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Thank you all for being here. Thank you for your effort. I also want to say thank you to the

Connelly Foundation, the Carpenters Hall, Cultural Works, William Penn Foundation and all the others who submitted written testimony for today's conversation that couldn't be here.

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

(No response.)

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: There being no further questions or comments from members of the Committee and no other witnesses to testify, I will ask that if there's anyone else present in this hearing whose name we failed to call wishes to offer any type of brief remarks?

(No response.)

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Hearing none, I want to say thank you to --

(Laughter.)

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: I

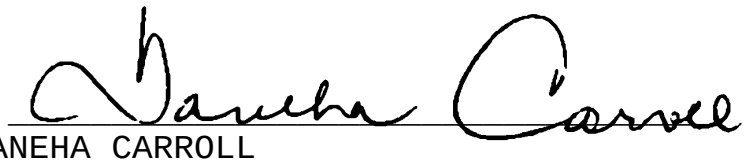
want to say thank you to all of the panels and witnesses for their participation today. Again, thank you to the Tech staff and everybody for being here to make this happen. We value your opinions.

And this concludes the business of the Committee. We will now recess this hearing to the call of the Chair. Have a good day, everybody. Thank you all.

(Committee on Legislative Oversight concluded at 3:42 p.m.)

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

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



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