

COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA
COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

Room 400, City Hall
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Thursday, December 6, 2012
9:50 a.m.

PRESENT:

COUNCILMAN BILL GREEN, CHAIR
COUNCILWOMAN JANNIE BLACKWELL
COUNCILMAN W. WILSON GOODE, JR.
COUNCILMAN WILLIAM K. GREENLEE
COUNCILMAN KENYATTA JOHNSON
COUNCILMAN DENNIS O'BRIEN
COUNCILWOMAN BLONDELL REYNOLDS BROWN
COUNCILMAN MARK SQUILLA
COUNCILWOMAN MARIAN B. TASCO

BILL 120955 - An ordinance amending Chapter
19-2400 of The Philadelphia Code, entitled
"Hotel Room Rental Tax," by increasing the
rate at which the Hospitality Promotion Tax is
imposed...

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COUNCILMAN GREEN: I am calling
to order the hearing of the Committee of
Finance on Bill No. 120955.

Will the Clerk please read the
title of the bill.

THE CLERK: An ordinance
amending Chapter 19-2400 of The
Philadelphia Code, entitled "Hotel Room
Rental Tax," by increasing the rate at
which the Hospitality Promotion Tax is
imposed and providing for terms for the
deposit and distribution of the revenues
from such additional tax, all under
certain terms and conditions.

COUNCILMAN GREEN: Thank you.

I note the presence of a quorum
in the persons of Councilmember Greenlee,
myself, Tasco, Blondell Reynolds Brown,
and Blackwell and Councilmember Johnson.

Will Alan Greenberger please
proceed with your testimony.

And Councilman Goode is also
present.

(Witness approached witness

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2 table.)

3 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Before we
4 proceed, Councilmember Blondell Reynolds
5 Brown has a few comments.

6 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: Thank you,
7 Mr. Chairman.

8 Good morning. I'd be remiss
9 not to at least acknowledge the number of
10 partners that have brought us to this
11 table this morning. And so I need to say
12 thank you to Greater Philadelphia Tourism
13 and Marketing Corporation, Meryl Levitz;
14 to the Philadelphia Convention and
15 Visitors Bureau and Jack Ferguson; to the
16 Greater Philadelphia Chamber of Commerce,
17 Rob Wonderling; the Greater Philadelphia
18 Hotel Association, James Gratton; and to
19 the Kinser Group, Holly Kinser, for the
20 conversations we've had, which started
21 summer 2012.

22 Today we consider the
23 Hospitality Promotion bill to help
24 support again Philadelphia's tourism and
25 hospitality industry, which we all know

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2 is an enormous economic engine for
3 Philadelphia. Why do we think it
4 necessary to do this? In 2008, the
5 Commonwealth of Pennsylvania enabled our
6 city to levy a tax of up to 1.5 percent
7 for the booking of hotel rooms. Eight
8 years ago, the funding for hospitality
9 and tourism around the Commonwealth was
10 \$6 million, and now that's dropped
11 dramatically to about \$180,000.

12 What we also know is that for
13 every dollar we spend to promote
14 Philadelphia, it typically generates \$100
15 in visitor spending for local businesses.
16 The compelling fact for me that
17 Councilman Goode always points to, it
18 equals 52,000 jobs locally and 88,000
19 jobs for the region.

20 And for that reason, we're here
21 this morning to examine and hear
22 testimony on the Hospitality Tax bill.

23 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

24 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Thank you.

25 Mr. Greenberger, if you would,

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2 as we discussed, please briefly state
3 your position on the bill, and your
4 testimony will be submitted for the
5 record.

6 DEPUTY MAYOR GREENBERGER:

7 Sure. Happy to do that.

8 Good morning, Mr. Chairman and
9 members of the Committee on Finance. I'm
10 Alan Greenberger, Deputy Mayor for
11 Economic Development and Director of
12 Commerce.

13 We are in support of this bill,
14 which authorizes an increase in the
15 Hospitality Promotion Tax from 1.2 to 1.5
16 percent. This is an idea that
17 Councilwoman Reynolds Brown has brought
18 to the Council. It's supported by all
19 the entities that are involved, what's
20 now called PHLCVB, Convention and
21 Visitors Bureau; GPTMC; the Hotel
22 Association; certainly the
23 Administration. This is obviously a
24 vital industry to Philadelphia.

25 It contains -- a few facts and

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2 then I'll stop.

3 It contains approximately
4 52,000 jobs in the City. That's nearly
5 10 percent of all the jobs in the City.
6 And according to the Tourism Economics,
7 visitor spending in Philadelphia is \$9.3
8 billion per year, \$26 million per day,
9 generating approximately 285 million in
10 regional municipal taxes. Simply put,
11 this is a very big piece of our economic
12 base. This tax will assist the two
13 primary agencies that market Philadelphia
14 to the world in attracting new tourism
15 business, fill our hotels, support our
16 Convention Center, and support the job
17 base in hospitality.

18 I'll leave it that and be happy
19 to answer your questions.

20 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Thank you.
21 I also note the presence of Councilmember
22 Squilla on the Committee.

23 Are there any questions from
24 members of Council?

25 (No response.)

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2 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Seeing none,
3 thank you for your testimony.

4 DEPUTY MAYOR GREENBERGER:
5 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

6 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Would Meryl
7 Levitz and Jack Ferguson please both come
8 forward.

9 (Witnesses approached witness
10 table.)

11 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Thank you.
12 I know both of your organizations do a
13 lot of great work, and it's outlined in
14 your testimony, which has been submitted
15 for the record. If you would just
16 briefly state your name for the record
17 and make a few comments.

18 MS. LEVITZ: My name is Meryl
19 Levitz. I'm President and CEO of GPTMC,
20 Greater Philadelphia Tourism Marketing
21 Corporation, and we thank City Council
22 for again looking to the tourism industry
23 for being a great replacement industry
24 for lost past jobs in Philadelphia. You
25 came to the support of this industry when

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2 GPTMC was created, then again after 9/11,
3 then again to put Philadelphia on the map
4 in terms of online, social networking,
5 web, et cetera, and we're very grateful
6 to you for considering this again in
7 these times of need.

8 Thank you.

9 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Thank you.

10 Mr. Ferguson.

11 MR. FERGUSON: Good morning and
12 thank you. I'm Jack Ferguson, the
13 President and CEO of the Philadelphia
14 Convention and Visitors Bureau, now
15 referred to as PHLCVB. We thank you for
16 having us here today.

17 We all know that tourism is a
18 very important part of what we do day in
19 and day out and creates those jobs. What
20 has been -- what the PHLCVB has been able
21 to do is to increase the convention
22 nights that are coming into the City. We
23 now have \$4 billion of future business on
24 the books. And also we have been able to
25 take Philadelphia from the 21st most

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2 visited destination in the United States
3 by international travelers to 12 and
4 moving that forward.

5 So we thank you for your time,
6 your support, and highly encourage you to
7 help us.

8 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Thank you
9 for your testimony.

10 Any questions from members of
11 the Committee?

12 (No response.)

13 COUNCILMAN GREEN: I note that
14 on KYW this morning I heard that
15 Philadelphia was named by Lonely Planet
16 as one of the ten best tourism cities in
17 the country, so --

18 MS. LEVITZ: It's the most --

19 COUNCILMAN GREEN: -- I'm sure
20 that's part of both of your good work to
21 get us there. So thank you very much.

22 MS. LEVITZ: A big part. We're
23 No. 4.

24 COUNCILMAN GREEN: No. 4?

25 MS. LEVITZ: Yes, we are.

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2 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Three more
3 to go.

4 MS. LEVITZ: Yes.

5 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Thanks.
6 Hopefully this extra tax will put us over
7 the top.

8 MS. LEVITZ: It will just do
9 it.

10 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Thank you.
11 Thank you for your testimony.

12 Mr. Grose. And while you're
13 stepping forward, Councilmember O'Brien,
14 who is also a member of this Committee,
15 is present.

16 (Witnesses approached witness
17 table.)

18 MR. GROSE: Good morning.

19 COUNCILMAN GREEN: State your
20 name for the record and please proceed
21 with your testimony.

22 MR. GROSE: Ed Grose, Executive
23 Director of Greater Philadelphia Hotel
24 Association.

25 MR. GRATTON: Good morning.

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2 Jim Gratton, General Manager of the
3 Philadelphia Downtown Courtyard and
4 President of the Greater Philadelphia
5 Hotel Association.

6 Thank you for taking the time
7 to hear our side today and our regret
8 that we've maybe thrown a little bit of a
9 wrench into this.

10 It's interesting to hear the
11 comments come across that we've been
12 working on this since the summer, because
13 the Hotel Association was only brought
14 into the loop about this tax about a
15 month ago. So it appears maybe there's
16 been some discussions without us, at
17 least over the first part of this.

18 We did meet as an association
19 with the two agencies. We do support
20 their efforts. They approached us
21 wanting us to increase the tax. We have
22 been hesitant about increasing that tax
23 for quite some time, since the original
24 tax was actually imposed. We had some
25 concerns and some things that we wanted

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2 to ensure were agreed to. We had a
3 verbal agreement to that, that we met
4 with them approximately two weeks ago.
5 Unfortunately, we've come to find that
6 that has not been able to come together
7 as quickly as we expected. So at this
8 point, until that is ironed out, we as an
9 association are withdrawing our support
10 to this bill.

11 We do believe and hope that we
12 can work this out, but right now, the
13 commitments that we needed to have our
14 members support this and what were told
15 to our members to gain their support have
16 not been agreed upon and implemented, and
17 until that's done, we as an association
18 cannot support this tax increase.

19 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Well, I
20 appreciate your testimony. I'll note
21 that the last time I was sitting here and
22 you were sitting there, you were telling
23 me that if we passed an important tax
24 reform for the future of our city, that
25 you would fire people in your hotel. I

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2 note that the next year, there were more
3 room nights and room stays in the City of
4 Philadelphia than at any time in its
5 history because of the work of
6 organizations like GPTMC and the
7 advertising they're doing regionally
8 because of the Convention Center and the
9 \$600 million that we have spent, the
10 state spent, and the City supports with
11 its \$15 million a year.

12 There is an incredible public
13 investment in the industry that is
14 supporting your business, and I'm very
15 disappointed that you would come here at
16 the last minute with this. But I have no
17 questions for you.

18 Any --

19 MR. GRATTON: We're
20 disappointed too in how this has come
21 down, absolutely.

22 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Any
23 questions from members of the Committee?

24 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: Good
25 morning, gentlemen.

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2 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Councilwoman
3 Brown.

4 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: Thank you
5 very much.

6 Am I hearing then that there is
7 a willingness to sit down with all of the
8 stakeholders involved and work through,
9 sort out, and figure out how you can
10 reach an amicable, mutually agreed-upon
11 agreement, when we know that the chief
12 beneficiaries of the work of these two
13 organizations ultimately leads to those
14 who run hotels? Is that fair to say?

15 MR. GRATTON: Absolutely.
16 They're partners with us. We hope we can
17 work this through. We thought we had.
18 We really did. And we've obviously got
19 the commitment from my membership to try
20 to work this out, but at this point,
21 what's been told to us and what's come
22 down in the last 24 hours is two
23 different things. And so that's
24 disappointing to us. The last thing we
25 want to be before you is looking as we

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2 support it in a letter to you a week ago,
3 and we really feel that something has
4 changed in the last minute behind our
5 backs, and it's very disappointing to us
6 as an association.

7 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Okay. Thank
8 you.

9 Any other questions from
10 members of the Committee?

11 (No response.)

12 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Seeing none,
13 we will move from the hearing on Bill No.
14 120 --

15 COUNCILMAN JOHNSON: I have one
16 quick question.

17 COUNCILMAN GREEN:
18 Councilmember Johnson. We are still in
19 the hearing.

20 COUNCILMAN JOHNSON: Could you
21 actually, I guess since we're discussing
22 it and we did receive a letter saying you
23 support it, give us an idea of what
24 unfolded that made your organization say
25 pause.

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2 MR. GRATTON: Obviously we
3 recognize the importance of tourism.
4 It's our business. It's our livelihood.
5 It's why we have jobs. And these
6 organizations have done a great job for
7 us. We have involvement with these
8 organizations, but we've actually always
9 felt our involvement with the GPTMC has
10 not been comparable to the PCVB from a
11 Board presence. We were asking for
12 additional Board seats that would have
13 more in line with that.

14 We give 80 percent of our tax
15 dollars to their budget. We have two
16 Board seats on a Board of 19. So if you
17 look at comparing the two organizations,
18 we are fully underrepresented, in our
19 mind, on the GPTMC side, and that was
20 what our discussion was and that is right
21 now what has not been finalized.

22 COUNCILMAN GREEN: My
23 understanding of the issue from our
24 sidebar conversation is that this is a
25 timing issue, not a willingness to do

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2 this issue.

3 MR. GRATTON: We hope so, yes.

4 MR. GROSE: Yes.

5 MR. GRATTON: We hope
6 absolutely it's a timing issue.

7 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Well, I
8 think you're dealing with honorable
9 people. And I guess that's all I'll have
10 to say about that. I'm sure it will be
11 worked out after the fact.

12 MR. GRATTON: If it's worked
13 out, we will be happy to support it.

14 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Well, it
15 will be passed today, I believe. Thank
16 you for your testimony.

17 This will end the hearing on
18 Bill No. 120955. We will move into a
19 public meeting, and I would ask
20 Councilmember Tasco to please make a
21 motion to move the bill.

22 COUNCILWOMAN TASCO:
23 Mr. Chairman, I move that Bill 120955 be
24 reported out of Committee with a
25 favorable recommendation and a request

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2 for the suspension of rules so that this
3 bill can be heard at Council's next
4 session.

5 (Duly seconded.)

6 COUNCILMAN GREEN: It has been
7 moved and seconded that Bill No. 120955
8 be reported from the Committee with a
9 favorable recommendation and a suspension
10 of the rules.

11 All in favor?

12 (Aye.)

13 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Any opposed?

14 (No response.)

15 COUNCILMAN GREEN: The ayes
16 have it.

17 Thank you for your presence
18 here today.

19 (Committee on Finance concluded
20 at 10:00 a.m.)

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CERTIFICATE

I HEREBY CERTIFY that the
proceedings, evidence and objections are
contained fully and accurately in the
stenographic notes taken by me upon the
foregoing matter on December 6, 2012, and that
this is a true and correct transcript of same.

MICHELE L. MURPHY
RPR-Notary Public

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