

Department of Parks and Recreation
Testimony of Nancy A. Goldenberg & Alexander “Pete” Hoskins
on behalf of
The Philadelphia Commission on Parks and Recreation
April 12, 2010

Good evening. My name is Nancy Goldenberg, and joining me is my colleague Pete Hoskins. Together, we represent the 15-member Commission on Parks and Recreation, and we thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of the FY 2011 proposed budget for the Department of Parks and Recreation. This proposed budget importantly calls for an addition of over \$3.2 million in the Department’s budget.

We are well aware that some may consider this increase an extravagance that the City can ill afford given its current deficit, but we believe otherwise. We believe that this increase is a wise and timely “investment of necessity” if Philadelphia is to prosper in today’s competitive economy – an economy that is far more reliant on the benefits of a green infrastructure and the health and well being of its citizens than ever before in our lifetimes.

Becoming the greenest city America, as Mayor Nutter declared in *Greenworks Philadelphia*, is an auspicious goal, but it is achievable. Let’s not forget that William Penn labeled Philadelphia as a “greene countrie towne” for a reason. But over time, others surpassed us in the use and maintenance of their green infrastructure and it paid off for them. The proposed FY 2011 budget is a clear endorsement of Philadelphia’s commitment to reclaim its #1 position and a recognition of our parks and recreation system as an economic generator.

Specifically, \$2.5 million in new funding will be used in part to accomplish the challenging goal of planting 300,000 new trees by 2015 in order to increase the tree canopy in every neighborhood by 30 percent, which the Commission supports. This initiative responds directly to the work of thousands of park and recreation advocates and gets us ever closer to being an amenity-rich city that can compete in today’s economy. New funds will also be used to help achieve another *Greenworks* goal – that of adding 500 new acres of open space by 2015 so that all residents are within a 10 minute-walk of a park or open space by 2025. Furthermore, the additional dollars will help increase the Department’s capacity to work as a unified agency to help ensure that all services and programs, particularly those for our youth, are top-notch and connected in meaningful ways to the exploration of the outdoors.

Even with this increased level of City funding however, the Department of Parks and Recreation cannot be successful if it remains largely dependent on municipal resources.

Because of its ability to attract tourists and recreational enthusiasts from throughout the region, the Department has an extraordinary opportunity to capture revenues from new sources and entrepreneurial activities. Learning from other cities, the Commission stands ready to support the Department in defining new funding strategies to supplement and

leverage City dollars by raising the additional money it needs – not just to meet today’s needs – but to achieve the vision of becoming the nation’s premier park and recreation system.

Now, let me turn it over to Pete Hoskins for a few brief comments.

Thank you, Nancy, and thank you members of City Council.

As Chair of the Commission’s Revenue Enhancement Committee, I too support the Mayor’s proposed budget for 2011 to add nearly \$3.3 million to the Department’s budget in support of important investments in our parks and recreation system. In a normal economic environment it might be pressing to suggest increasing the budget of parks and recreation. But at last there is clear recognition that municipal support of Philadelphia’s parks and recreation system, which can be an extraordinary resource for increased tourism, enhanced retail opportunity, higher property values and environmental mitigation, has fallen far behind inflation over the past three decades. At last there is demonstrated a determination to do something about that.

Fortunately over the years, the former Fairmount Park Commission and the Recreation Department have helped make up a portion of that deficit with private funds developed through public/private partnerships with a wide range of organizations including the Fairmount Park Conservancy, the Recreation Advisory Councils, sports associations, concessionaires, historic preservation organizations, and organizations promoting special events. Revenue from these activities not only adds enormously to the maintenance and programs of the (now new) Park and Recreation Department, but also encourages private donations not otherwise possible for the City – totaling nearly \$8 million in operation funds and additional millions for capital improvements.

Having many years of experience in Fairmount Park and now in the private non-profit sector, I can assure that continued encouragement of entrepreneurial activity to augment the General Fund will be successful if the City continues its promise to add investments as well. As members of the new Parks and Recreation Commission, I can report that we are working hard to develop policies and guidelines that employ the best practices of successful parks and recreation departments across the country. In doing so, we have the benefit of using the thoughtful work done in recent years by the Park Reform Task Force, the Fairmount Park Alliance, and others in developing models of public/private support for parks and recreation programs that augment the City’s commitment.

We understand the delicate balance between accountability, accessibility, equity to all citizens, and entrepreneurship in a public environment. The new Parks and Recreation Commission is dedicated to encouraging new bases of financial support and acting as a bridge to the Mayor and City Council to assure that, in the end, it is the citizens of Philadelphia who get the best parks and recreation programs possible. Our citizens deserve nothing less.

Thank you.