



Testimony of Stephanie Michel
North 5th Street Revitalization Project
Before the City Council Finance Committee

Good day Council,

My name is Stephanie Michel and I am the Director of the North 5th Street Revitalization Project. We work closely with the merchants and residents of Olney to improve the North 5th Street commercial corridor.

In 2006 we received funding, with the support of our Councilwoman Tasco, through the city's Commerce Department allowing us to start a project for the revitalization of our commercial corridor. Since then the North 5th Street commercial corridor has begun to flourish and radiates from its hub at 5th and Olney down to 5th and the boulevard, a 1.5 mile stretch with has over 330 active businesses. North 5th Street is a vibrant pedestrian and public transit friendly shopping area. For several years our office only ran on the manpower of volunteers. Our work and staff has progressed, although slowly, now with a two person office assisting businesses in securing the required licensing for the business and their signage, providing technical assistance through workshops and one-to-one consulting, managing the business association, providing a daily cleaning service, organizing and hosting multiple marketing events to attract customers to the district and providing business services. We are operating like a one man band developing a plan, networking with partners, providing services and supporting our merchants, encouraging those who want to open new businesses and of course constantly chasing the next funding possibility.

10 years later the bulk of our funding still mainly comes from the Commerce Department's Targeted Corridor Management Program and Corridor Cleaning grants, both of which are funded with CDBG dollars and limits what the funding can support. We are thankful for Councilwoman Parker's support through the Philadelphia Activities Fund which allows us to host community focused activities, such as Open Mic Night in Olney, classes such as yoga, zumba, bop and chacha, self defense class and so much more at our local library or our neighborhood park of Fisher Park. The vast majority of our businesses are immigrant owned mom and pop shops with limited resources, so we rely on Commerce Department funds for our economic development activities. Our ultimate goal is to establish a partnership for CDC tax for unrestricted funding. With unrestricted funding our organization would be able to take our efforts to the next level and improve on existing programs as well as accomplish more activities such as:

- Expand our staffing
- Help more merchants with storefront improvements, workshops and enhanced technical assistance
- Improve Streetscape with public trash receptacles, benches, public art, bike racks and murals
- Improve safety with security cameras and street lighting

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- Green the corridor with trees, planters and landscaping
- Promote the corridor through more events, activities and publications

Like all good things in life, community and economic development takes time. We see that our selves, in building relationships with business owners, residents, and community partners. The largest investment in economic development is time and consistency. Many of our business owners on North 5th are immigrant business owners and are leary of anything that may be affiliated with government. The benefit of having a secure funding source for a ten year period is immeasurable. Secure ten year funding to an organization providing services in a underserved neighborhood, especially through business development and neighborhood improvements, which inspires community pride and may also spur the creation of new jobs, which benefits the community as a whole. Secure funding allows a CDC to develop a longer strategy, provide better services and implement a neighborhood plan more efficiently. Our neighborhood plan to revitalize North 5th includes a timeline to implement over the span of 10 years. One would think all you need is a plan and bam those ideas just come to life but it takes years to get everyone to know and understand the plan, to know their role in implementing the plan and lastly to execute. It takes time, but that's where the beauty in restoring a community lies. The impact to a commercial corridor and its surrounding residents is more than physical, more than economic it lifts the whole "spirit" of a neighborhood creating a better place to live, work and play so that people can honestly say, "This is my community I live here I work here I am responsible what happens here"

For the past 4 years, we have been identifying and meeting with possible partners in order to be prepared to take advantage of this program. We have tried every possible avenue to secure a possible spot; we've met with local businesses and institutions, we've tried using the networks of board members, as well as cold calling possible partners with no success and much anxiety. One of the main issues we've faced in our efforts has been to identify a partner organization that has a yearly BIRT tax liability of \$100,000. Although we have considerable number of "large" corporations in the city, there is no way of determining who is eligible short of meeting with them. We have found that we often end up at a dead end with the possible corporation with the reduction in BIRT tax rates over the years, it's getting harder to find businesses with that level of liability to the city. Being able to partner with a company that has real estate tax liability up to \$100,000, that would open up a larger pool of opportunity of potential businesses that we can recruit to participate. This change would make the recruitment process less daunting and would save time as it would also make it easy to find targeted businesses since their tax liability is publicly available information.

An effective and accessible CDC Tax Credit program for works hand-in-hand with the City's efforts to keep Philadelphia neighborhoods sustained, equitable, and restored. The CDC Tax Credit Program has the potential to be a holistic approach to neighborhood development by making sure that the CDCs that are the social workers, nurses, teachers, and cleaning crew of our neighborhoods are well funded.

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Without dedicating resources to our neighborhood main streets, the ecology of Philadelphia's redevelopment remains out of balance.

On behalf of the merchants of North 5th Street in Olney, I urge City Council and Mayor Kenney to expand the CDC Tax Credit program. With this committed investment to restoring communities CDCs can continue their efforts in making their communities shine. I thank you for your time today.