



Testimony of Beth McConnell
Policy Director, Philadelphia Association of Community Development Corporations
On Bills No. 190854, 190855, 190856, and 190857
Before the Committee on Appropriations, City Council of Philadelphia
November 12, 2019

Good afternoon Chairperson Quinones-Sanchez and Vice Chair Johnson, my name is Beth McConnell, and I'm the Policy Director for the Philadelphia Association of Community Development Corporations (PACDC) here to testify on Bills 190854, 190855, 190856, and 190857.

These transfer ordinances include boosts in funding for several critical equitable development programs PACDC has long advocated for, and we thank the Kenney Administration and City Council for proposing to strengthen them.

It includes \$10 million for the PHL-TCB, or Philadelphia Taking Care of Business program championed by Councilmember Parker. This program would significantly boost commercial corridor cleaning and blight removal in every Council district in Philadelphia, while also providing employment opportunities for cleaning staff.

Philadelphia already has a strong commercial corridor cleaning program that can be built upon to make this program a success. In 2018, 15 organizations collected 19,878 bags of trash and recycling—that's 76 bags of trash every weekday across the city. Many of these organizations also removed thousands of illegal signs, instances of graffiti, and other blighting influences on corridors. Thanks to Council and the Administration, funding for that program was boosted this year to expand to more than 23 organizations, which is funding cleaning on more corridors, for more days and hours, and with more adequately paid staff. But even this is not enough. Litter and short dumping can pile up as soon as it's cleaned. In a city with more than 250 commercial corridors, about half of which are pedestrian-oriented, we have many corridors that get no attention at all.

At a time when small businesses face competition from big box stores and on-line retailers, we must remove as many barriers as possible to help them attract customers. To give our local entrepreneurs a shot at success, every pedestrian oriented corridor in Philadelphia should be clean, safe, well-lit and attractive places to shop, dine, and access services. PACDC is also pleased to see \$400,000 in funding in the transfer ordinances for the business security camera program, which recently ran out of funds and is not currently accepting new applications. This program provides 50% reimbursements up to \$3,000 for small businesses that install

external cameras and register them with the Police Department's SafeCam program. These cameras help deter criminal behavior outside our retailers, making customers and store owners safer.

The transfer ordinance also includes an additional \$2.5 million in capital funds for projects on commercial corridors to make critical physical upgrades such as replacement of sidewalks, curb cuts, lighting, and other improvements that makes corridors safer and more attractive.

The transfer ordinances also include more than \$8 million in new funding for the Housing Trust Fund, some of which has been set aside for the Philly First homebuying program, championed last year by Council President Clarke, and Councilmembers Sanchez, Squilla, and Parker and with the support of all members of Council and the Administration. This program has been a resounding success since launched this past June. As of October, 545 grants were awarded for a total of \$4.7 million, helping moderate income households achieve the dream of homeownership. The average purchase price of the homes was \$160,000, which is affordable for a family earning Philadelphia's Median Household Income. And the transfer taxes paid to the city from these new homeowners offset 60% of the grant funds. The program is a win-win, and thanks to the hard work of our housing counselors across the city who help implement it, is giving moderate income Philadelphians the chance to build household wealth from a changing city.

The Land Bank also gets a boost in resources in the transfer ordinance of \$5.05 million, which is needed to fund basic operations as well as acquire more vacant, tax delinquent parcels. Acquisition of vacant parcels is fundamental to the Land Bank's mission, as it allows for assemblages of developable land that makes the existing public land inventory more usable including for affordable homes. It also allows for strategic acquisition in changing neighborhoods of parcels that can be used to create affordable homes for low- or moderate-income Philadelphians.

PACDC thanks City Council and the Kenney Administration, including the Department of Planning and Development, the Division of Housing and Community Development, and the Commerce Department, for working with us and the CDC community to fund and implement these successful programs that strengthen communities and create a more equitable city.

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