

COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA
COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE AND
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Room 400, City Hall
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Wednesday, March 11, 2015
11:05 a.m.

PRESENT:

COUNCILMAN W. WILSON GOODE, JR., CHAIR
COUNCILMAN KENYATTA JOHNSON
COUNCILMAN BRIAN J. O'NEILL

RESOLUTION 150082 - Resolution authorizing the
Committee on Commerce and Economic Development
to hold hearings on the Storefront Improvement
Program and its impact on small businesses and
neighborhood economic development.

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COUNCILMAN GOODE: Good morning. This hearing is called to order. This is a public hearing of the Commerce and Economic Development Committee on Resolution No. 150082. My name is W. Wilson Goode, Jr., Chair of this Committee.

A quorum is not necessary. Other members will come and they will be watching on television.

The title of Resolution No. 150082, authorizing the Committee on Commerce and Economic Development to hold hearings on the Storefront Improvement Program and its impact on small businesses and neighborhood economic development.

Our first witness is Yvonne Boye from the Commerce Department.

(Witnesses approached witness table.)

COUNCILMAN GOODE: Good morning. Please state your name for the record and proceed with your testimony.

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2 MS. BOYE: Good morning,
3 Councilman. My name is Yvonne Boye. I'm
4 the Director of the Office of
5 Neighborhood Economic Development of the
6 Commerce Department in the City of
7 Philadelphia. With me is Jonathan
8 Snyder, who is the Senior Manager of the
9 program, the SIP program.

10 I'm here to testify on
11 Resolution No. 150082, which authorizes
12 City Council hearings on the Storefront
13 Improvement Program and its impact on
14 small businesses and neighborhood
15 economic development.

16 The purpose of the Storefront
17 Improvement Program is to encourage
18 businesses and property owners within
19 eligible neighborhood commercial
20 corridors to improve their storefronts,
21 so as to make them more attractive to
22 shoppers and increase their vitality and
23 economic performance. We target specific
24 commercial corridors throughout the City
25 because of their eligibility through our

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2 various funding streams and their
3 commercial density. Commercial density
4 is important, as an investment in one
5 business can impact the perception and
6 foot traffic of an entire corridor. We
7 have also seen that when one business
8 makes an improvement, other businesses
9 follow.

10 We target 72 different
11 commercial corridors throughout the City,
12 63 of which are in low- and
13 moderate-income neighborhoods, eight
14 neighborhoods which are not CDBG
15 eligible, and one in the American Street
16 Empowerment Zone. The program is
17 designed to be easy to apply to, and the
18 applicant can be either the owner of a
19 commercially occupied property or a
20 tenant business. The business must
21 provide goods or services that are
22 available to neighborhood residents.
23 Typical improvements include new signage,
24 new awnings, new windows and doors,
25 painting, masonry repair, and cornice

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2 repair.

3 We work with our neighborhood
4 partners throughout the City to publicize
5 the program and encourage businesses to
6 apply. We use different funding streams
7 in order to benefit as many corridors and
8 businesses as we can, including federal
9 CDBG, state DCED, and Empowerment Zone
10 funding. Funding from some sources has
11 expired, such as the Commercial Corridor
12 Bond Program, NTI, a federal EDI grant,
13 and a local stimulus bill funded under
14 the previous Administration. The state
15 DCED funds are almost depleted. Since
16 2009, 382 projects have been completed,
17 and 2.9 million in public funding has
18 leveraged 4.9 million in private funding.
19 For years 2011 through 2014, we averaged
20 82 projects per year. The average
21 project cost for all projects is \$20,205
22 and the average reimbursement amount is
23 \$7,494.

24 ONED is finalizing a report
25 which found that businesses which

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2 improved the appearance of their
3 storefronts using the Storefront
4 Improvement Program did better
5 economically than their neighbors who
6 didn't use the program. We compared
7 businesses which participated in SIP to
8 businesses which did not participate in
9 SIP on two commercial corridors. On the
10 1200 to 1900 blocks of the East Passyunk
11 Avenue from 2010 to 2012, commercial
12 corridors which participated in SIP had
13 their total receipts increase by 44
14 percent. Alternatively, businesses which
15 did not participate in SIP had their
16 total receipts increase only by 13
17 percent in the same time period. On the
18 1200 to 1900 blocks of Frankford Avenue,
19 there was a 5 percent decline from 2009
20 to 2012 in total receipts for businesses
21 which did not go through SIP and a 19
22 percent increase for those that did
23 participate in SIP over that same time
24 period.

25 Additionally, median home

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2 values in tracts that received SIP grants
3 increased 12 percent between 2009 and
4 2012 compared to 10 percent in tracts
5 which did not receive SIP grants.
6 Finally, according to an analysis of
7 Google Maps, 75 percent of the buildings
8 that undertook facade improvements as
9 part of an SIP grant had one or more
10 adjacent buildings improve their facades
11 within the three following years.

12 SIP is accomplishing its goal
13 of increasing the economic performance of
14 businesses by encouraging well-designed
15 facade improvements in order to make
16 commercial corridors more attractive to
17 customers.

18 I'm happy to respond to
19 questions at this time. Thank you.

20 COUNCILMAN GOODE: Thank you
21 for your testimony. This question is for
22 you and/or Mr. Snyder. Are there written
23 regulations for the program?

24 MS. BOYE: Yes, there are.

25 COUNCILMAN GOODE: And when do

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2 those regulations go into effect?

3 MS. BOYE: We've had -- the
4 current ones went into effect January of
5 this year.

6 COUNCILMAN GOODE: And what was
7 the change from the previous regulations?

8 MS. BOYE: The change -- the
9 previous regulation did not require
10 Davis-Bacon wage rate, that the
11 prevailing wage rates to be paid on
12 labor. The current ones require that.

13 COUNCILMAN GOODE: And that
14 change was made because of what?

15 MS. BOYE: Well, the change was
16 made because we had a new program, and as
17 we were going through the program, we had
18 some advice from HUD that the Davis-Bacon
19 wage rates should also apply to SIP and
20 not just the other program. So HUD
21 actually determined that we should do
22 that now.

23 COUNCILMAN GOODE: So it's a
24 federal requirement?

25 MS. BOYE: Yes.

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2 COUNCILMAN GOODE: And have you
3 tracked any differences in the program
4 based upon that new requirement?

5 MS. BOYE: Yes. We have some
6 numbers, and I'll let Jonathan talk about
7 the numbers. However, it's just a couple
8 of years into the year, so we can't quite
9 tell. But clearly there's a decrease
10 compared with the same time period in
11 previous years.

12 MR. SNYDER: Yes. And for
13 years --

14 COUNCILMAN GOODE: Please state
15 your name for the record.

16 MR. SNYDER: Thank you. My
17 name is Jonathan Snyder, Senior Manager
18 at the Philadelphia Commerce Department
19 and I manage the SIP program in addition
20 to the InStore Forgivable Loan Program.

21 And in the years 2010, '11,
22 '12 -- excuse me; 2011 through '13, we
23 averaged about 32 applications in the
24 time period of these -- the few months
25 preceding the rollout of the new program,

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2 and in this year -- excuse me; subsequent
3 to rolling out the new program. And in
4 this year, we received 16 applications.
5 So it is a decrease from previous years.

6 COUNCILMAN GOODE: So at what
7 point will you consider adjusting the
8 regulations based upon the new data that
9 you have? I mean, how often will you
10 review the new regulations?

11 MS. BOYE: As to the impact?

12 COUNCILMAN GOODE: Yes.

13 MS. BOYE: We'll do that six
14 months and then we'll do that after a
15 year as well.

16 COUNCILMAN GOODE: Okay. And
17 I'm going to listen to the rest of the
18 testimony. I think you may be aware that
19 I actually managed the program during the
20 '90s, as I'm extremely familiar with the
21 program at that point. It was
22 administered differently. In some cases
23 Davis-Bacon did apply, but also the City
24 did not require a match at that point,
25 and so we were able to proceed different

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2 ways and it had the same impact. It also
3 was used to build business association
4 membership.

5 And so I'm not going to suggest
6 what changes you may or may not want to
7 make yet, but at some point, I think you
8 have to consider how the new regulations
9 have impacted the program. But I don't
10 have any further questions at this time.
11 Thank you very much.

12 MS. BOYE: Yes. Thank you.

13 COUNCILMAN GOODE: Our next
14 panel is Beth McConnell, Alex Balloon,
15 Sam Thomas, and Philip Green.

16 (Witnesses approached witness
17 table.)

18 COUNCILMAN GOODE: Good
19 morning. Please state your name for the
20 record and proceed with your testimony.

21 MS. McCONNELL: Good morning,
22 Chairman Goode. My name is Beth
23 McConnell. I'm the Policy Director for
24 the Philadelphia Association of Community
25 Development Corporations, PACDC, and we'd

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2 like to thank you, Chairman, as well as
3 Councilman Henon for his leadership in
4 introducing Resolution 150082 as well as
5 co-sponsor Councilwoman Bass and the
6 support of City Council for our
7 neighborhood commercial corridors.

8 The Storefront Improvement
9 Program, or SIP as it's called, is an
10 excellent example of how modest
11 investments in our neighborhood
12 commercial corridors make a big impact.
13 Run by the Department of Commerce, SIP
14 provides matching grants for small
15 businesses to help them fix up the
16 facades of the properties that they rent
17 or own. Since 2009, more than 342
18 unsightly, outdated, blighted or
19 uninviting storefronts have been
20 transformed with new windows, doors,
21 signs, paint, lighting or other features.
22 Business owners that have benefited from
23 SIP -- and some of them are here today,
24 and you'll hear from them -- report an
25 increase in foot traffic and sales, which

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2 leads to returns to the City in more
3 sales, wage, and business tax payments.

4 But SIP does more than just
5 help the business owner whose storefront
6 gets improved. It improves the look of
7 the entire corridor and leverages
8 additional private investment on other
9 nearby properties from those who decide
10 to "keep up with the Joneses," if you
11 will, by fixing up their storefronts as
12 well. And in my written testimony, I
13 provide a couple of examples. I also
14 have here, which I'll hand out to you,
15 photos by Council district of before and
16 after, some really dramatic
17 transformations.

18 CDCs have worked hand in hand
19 with small businesses on our neighborhood
20 corridors to make this program a success.
21 CDCs recruit small businesses to
22 participate in the program, help them
23 complete their applications, help them
24 find qualified neighborhood contractors.
25 Sometimes CDCs get engaged to help one

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2 individual business owner and sometimes
3 it's part of a coordinated, long-range
4 plan to transform the entire corridor.
5 Additionally, the Community Design
6 Collaborative, another citywide
7 non-profit, also plays a key role in
8 providing pro bono design services to
9 many small businesses that participate in
10 SIP to create high-quality projects.

11 Unfortunately, as you've heard,
12 Commerce was forced to unveil new SIP
13 guidelines in December 2014 that threaten
14 this dynamic, successful program.
15 Through no fault of the Department's and
16 entirely due to federal restrictions, the
17 new guidelines make SIP less accessible
18 to small businesses, more expensive, and
19 could lead to fewer dramatic
20 transformations and far smaller projects.
21 That's because the program is funded
22 almost entirely through the federal
23 Community Development Block Grant
24 program, CDBG, established under the
25 Community Development Act, which requires

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2 that contractors and subcontractors be
3 paid prevailing wage on projects where
4 more than \$2,000 in federal funds are
5 used. It's estimated that this will
6 increase the cost of SIP projects by two
7 to four times, and fewer businesses will
8 be able to benefit if the limited funds
9 become spread much thinner.

10 Additionally, to show
11 compliance with prevailing wage,
12 contractors are required to submit
13 detailed reports on pay and benefits for
14 all workers involved in the project. And
15 as we'll hear, this has deterred some
16 neighborhood contractors from even
17 bidding on SIP projects because it's too
18 onerous to ask their subcontractors for
19 such a level of detail when their portion
20 of the work may be valued at just a few
21 hundred or a few thousand dollars. And
22 keep in mind that some of our small
23 neighborhood contractors still write
24 invoices from a paper pad and don't have
25 so much as a website, let alone

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2 computerized payment and invoicing
3 systems.

4 If a contractor fails to
5 produce the wage and benefit
6 documentation after the work has been
7 completed, the small business owner could
8 become 100 percent responsible for the
9 project costs, and that's because,
10 fairly, the Commerce Department can't
11 release grant funds if the project is not
12 in compliance and, as a result, some
13 small businesses that just cannot take
14 that risk are scared away and their
15 storefronts remain unimproved.

16 To be clear, prevailing wage
17 rules are in place for the use of federal
18 dollars for a good reason. Workers
19 deserve family-sustaining pay and
20 benefits. But the rules we're operating
21 under now were set in 1931 and have not
22 been adjusted for inflation. If they
23 had, the requirements would only kick in
24 if more than \$31,000 in federal funds
25 were used, which is far below what SIP

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2 provides to businesses. And while
3 there's precedent in the Community
4 Development Act to exempt small projects
5 from prevailing wage rules, currently
6 only housing developments of eight or
7 fewer units are exempted, and no similar
8 exemption exists for small storefront
9 projects. Changing those rules would
10 probably require an act of Congress, an
11 act of somebody in Washington, which, of
12 course, could take years.

13 PACDC really does want to
14 applaud the Commerce Department for doing
15 a tremendous job in redesigning the
16 program to comply with the federal rules
17 in the least onerous way possible. The
18 Department has also provided very
19 significant support to CDCs, small
20 businesses, and contractors to help them
21 understand how to comply and access the
22 program, and we believe that the
23 Department was very effective in running
24 SIP before these guidelines were put in
25 place. But their hands are tied by

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2 federal rules that were not designed with
3 SIP and small neighborhood projects or
4 contractors in mind.

5 So that's why we're urging
6 Mayor Nutter and City Council to work
7 together during this budget negotiation
8 to fund SIP with General Fund dollars
9 instead of the federal funds. If the
10 entire program were to be funded with
11 local dollars and kept at level funding
12 for the grants and support services, we
13 believe about \$535,000 would be needed.
14 And that would free up the CDBG funds for
15 some other critical commercial corridor
16 or neighborhood economic development
17 program. It would also give Commerce the
18 flexibility to design rules for SIP that
19 make sense for Philadelphia, as well as
20 the flexibility to consider funding SIP
21 projects on corridors that may not be
22 eligible for CDBG funding, but still face
23 some real significant challenges and
24 would benefit from a modest public
25 investment.

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2 In closing, we understand that
3 there are a lot of demands on the General
4 Fund this year and every year for many
5 worthwhile programs, but we believe that
6 SIP and our neighborhood small businesses
7 are worth the investment. The program
8 contributes to a more equitable city by
9 investing in neighborhood economic
10 development, which makes our city
11 stronger for everyone.

12 Thank you for allowing me to
13 testify.

14 COUNCILMAN GOODE: Thank you
15 for your testimony.

16 Let me note for the record that
17 Councilman Squilla, Vice Chair of the
18 Committee, is present, as well as
19 Councilman O'Neill.

20 Let's proceed with the next
21 witness. Please state your name for the
22 record.

23 MR. BALLOON: Thank you very
24 much, Councilman Goode. My name is Alex
25 Balloon and I am the Manager of Tacony

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2 Community Development Corporation. I've
3 submitted my written testimony for the
4 record, but I just want to summarize how
5 this has been an integral part of helping
6 to turn our neighborhood around.

7 When I first started three
8 years ago, Torresdale Avenue in Tacony
9 was riddled with a litter, blight, and a
10 climbing vacancy rate, and there was just
11 a pervasive sense of decline. We used
12 the community-based approach to confront
13 these challenges head on, and working
14 with the Philadelphia Commerce Department
15 in partnership, we set out to fix 15
16 storefronts using a historic
17 preservation-based approach. That
18 program helped our store owners reconnect
19 with old customers and attract new ones
20 and generate a positive neighborhood
21 momentum. Some of our stores reported a
22 sales increase of nearly 20 percent after
23 the storefront renovation program.

24 Today we're in the process of
25 restoring an additional 11 storefronts.

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2 These improvements are encouraging other
3 property owners to fix up their buildings
4 and nearby homes. As part of the
5 approach, we have planted 52 new trees,
6 we've added 27 new security cameras. And
7 it's not just fixing up storefronts; our
8 corridor's effective vacancy rate has
9 fallen by 70 percent and we estimate a
10 net gain of 77 jobs. We have a brand new
11 destination restaurant set to open soon,
12 along with a million-dollar renovation of
13 the Tacony library, of which we are a
14 partner.

15 This isn't a secret approach to
16 community and economic development. It
17 can be replicated in outlying
18 neighborhoods all across the City of
19 Philadelphia. But without adjustments to
20 the Storefront Program to make it more
21 user-friendly, it will be exponentially
22 more difficult.

23 The toughest part of a program
24 like this one is getting that first
25 storefront renovated on a commercial

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2 corridor, building that trust and taking
3 the leap together. That first storefront
4 is an advertisement for what's possible
5 and that things are changing for the
6 better in the neighborhood. Our City
7 Storefront Improvement Program was a
8 model program not only for the City of
9 Philadelphia but for other cities
10 nationwide. This program provided Tacony
11 with visible milestones and progress to
12 break the cycle of disinvestment that had
13 been plaguing our neighborhood for far
14 too long. This program is small in the
15 scope of the City's budget, but it's
16 transformative. This program is the
17 definition of low-cost, high-impact
18 community development. This program
19 touches people in their neighborhoods and
20 helps neighborhoods reclaim their
21 commercial corridors as the centers of
22 their community.

23 I want to thank Chairman Goode
24 and Councilman Henon for taking the time
25 to highlight the opportunities and

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2 challenges of this important neighborhood
3 economic development program.

4 Thank you.

5 COUNCILMAN GOODE: Thank you
6 for your testimony.

7 Please state your name for the
8 record.

9 MR. THOMAS: My name is Sam
10 Thomas. I'm the Commercial Corridor
11 Coordinator for the New Kensington
12 Community Development Corporation, or
13 NKCDC. Thank you for giving me the
14 opportunity to speak before you today.

15 As Commercial Corridor
16 Coordinators and Managers, it's our role
17 to interface with the entrepreneurs and
18 small businesses in our service area.
19 Through doing this, we introduce business
20 people to programs and processes
21 essential to the success of their
22 business. In its previous iteration, as
23 a program that did not trigger prevailing
24 wage laws, SIP was one of the most useful
25 of these tools. It enabled us to empower

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2 our constituents to change the very face
3 of their business.

4 One of the most valuable
5 aspects of the SIP program is that built
6 into it is an opportunity for Commercial
7 Corridor Coordinators to work closely
8 with business owners. That's something
9 that we want to do all the time.

10 Traditionally, depending on how
11 comfortable with the program the business
12 or property owner is, we engage an
13 applicant from start to finish. We
14 explain the program, the requirements,
15 and the application process. Quite often
16 applicants will bring their rough drafts
17 of the application to us for
18 troubleshooting and additional guidance.
19 Once the application is submitted --
20 often we submit on behalf of the
21 applicant -- and reviewed, we work with
22 the applicant to address any feedback
23 from the Design Review Committee, the
24 committee that looks at the proposal and
25 kind of gives feedback about if it looks

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2 good or not.

3 This level of interaction is
4 vital to us since it helps to foster
5 trust and build great working
6 relationships with businesses. An
7 example of this is the 300 block of East
8 Girard Avenue. NKCDC worked with the
9 property and business owners to do SIP
10 projects on that block. The result was
11 an award-winning design project and
12 strong relationships with the business
13 owners. In fact, on that block, since
14 the SIP has been done, a vacant lot was
15 developed into a restaurant and a second
16 restaurant opened up in an existing
17 storefront. We credit the SIP program
18 with catalyzing this development. As an
19 economic and design tool and a
20 relationship-building mechanism, the SIP
21 program is invaluable to the work that we
22 do on commercial corridors.

23 However, the prevailing wage
24 standards have seriously impacted the
25 utility of the program. Interest in the

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2 program has decreased drastically, and
3 those that we are able to get to the
4 submittal phase are dangerously close to
5 the \$2,000 mark. In those cases,
6 comments from the Design Committee can
7 easily put a project over budget and
8 trigger prevailing wage.

9 On the relationship-building
10 side of things, the SIP program is sorely
11 missed. It's one less viable option for
12 business and it's one less service we can
13 confidently offer our clients.

14 Thank you.

15 COUNCILMAN GOODE: Thank you
16 for your testimony.

17 Next witness.

18 MR. GREEN: My name is Philip
19 Green. I'm the Program Director for the
20 North 5th Street Revitalization Project.
21 If I could submit my testimony for the
22 record. Thank you.

23 Good day, members of the
24 Committee on Commerce and Economic
25 Development. My name is Philip Green and

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2 I am the Program Director of the North

3 5th Street Revitalization Project.

4 Stephanie Michel, who is in attendance

5 here today, and myself work closely with

6 the merchants and residents of Olney to

7 improve the North 5th Street commercial

8 corridor. Our portion of the North 5th

9 Street corridor is located in the

10 districts of Councilwoman Marian Tasco

11 and Councilwoman Cindy Bass.

12 Implementing the SIP program is

13 a crucial part of our work. In the last

14 four years, we have successfully improved

15 11 storefronts through SIP. These 11

16 projects used a total of 82,323 in SIP

17 funds, which leveraged \$114,505 in

18 private investment from merchants and

19 property owners, for a total investment

20 of just shy of \$200,000.

21 These SIP projects range from

22 simple \$2,500 awnings to complete \$31,000

23 facade transformations. I feel it is

24 important to mention that all 11 of the

25 businesses assisted were minority and/or

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2 female-owned businesses and provided
3 goods and services to the surrounding
4 low- and moderate-income neighborhood.

5 Just as an example, in 2013,
6 the owner of Tommy's Place Restaurant,
7 Mr. Han, was stretched for cash, but
8 still wanted to replace his hanging
9 banner sign -- his sagging banner sign
10 and faded projecting sign. He had heard
11 about the SIP program and reached out to
12 me to get started. As I spoke with him
13 about the SIP application, we discussed
14 what his new signage might look like.
15 Over the course of the following weeks, I
16 helped Mr. Han choose an awning that
17 would conceal his ugly security grates,
18 match the look of his existing
19 architecture, and comply with the zoning
20 requirements for his property. I also
21 helped him design a new logo and guided
22 him in selecting a qualified contractor
23 licensed to work in the City. All said
24 and done, SIP contributed \$1,245 towards
25 his total project cost of just around

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2 \$2,500. This SIP reimbursement not only
3 made it possible for Mr. Han to afford
4 new signage, it afforded him the
5 assistance to develop a new logo, comply
6 with SIP regulations -- pardon me; comply
7 with L&I regulations, and choose the best
8 materials for the job.

9 You can see a before and after
10 photo of that restaurant on the following
11 page. You can see it's a huge
12 transformation for just a little over
13 \$1,200 in City funds. It went a long
14 way.

15 Another example of how a little
16 bit of SIP investment can go a long way
17 is through Olney Spine Chiropractic
18 Office. The business owner, Sean Pham,
19 wanted to start his own practice and
20 secured a lease on a long vacant and
21 graffiti-prone storefront. With \$3,723
22 of SIP funds and the same amount of his
23 own money, Dr. Pham transformed this
24 blighted property into an active,
25 inviting, and tax-generating property

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2 that is now a force for good on its
3 block. You can also see a before and
4 after photo of that one.

5 These examples and hundreds
6 more throughout the City are a major
7 force behind Philadelphia's current
8 renaissance. The SIP program is the
9 Broken Windows Theory at work, literally
10 fixing broken windows. Unfortunately,
11 the imposition of strict guidelines on
12 the program have brought my current SIP
13 applicants and I to a screeching halt.

14 Under the original program
15 guidelines, the Commerce Department, the
16 merchant, and I worked together to
17 complete an SIP. Now, in order to
18 complete an SIP from start to finish, the
19 process requires the lockstep
20 coordination between myself, the
21 merchant, the Commerce Department, the
22 Office of Labor Standards, a willing and
23 dutiful contractor, and in many cases
24 willing and dutiful subcontractors.
25 That's a bare minimum of five parties

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2 spanning the public, private, and
3 non-profit sectors working in perfect
4 harmony to renovate an entire storefront
5 or install a simple window awning. It's
6 not a very enticing incentive program.

7 I recently requested an
8 estimate for a total storefront
9 renovation from Mr. Contractor Inc., one
10 of Angie's List's top-rated contractors
11 in the region and no stranger to SIP
12 projects under the program's former
13 guidelines. After a week, the
14 representative, Barry Spector, e-mailed
15 me saying, "I have not been able to come
16 up with a way to provide pay stubs for
17 labor, being that the majority of the
18 work would be done by subcontractors.
19 Unfortunately I will not be able to
20 provide services under these
21 circumstances."

22 Under its current funding
23 source, the SIP program is struggling to
24 repair the City's broken windows,
25 struggling to lend a hand up to small

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2 businesses, and struggling to make our
3 corridors the vibrant centerpieces to our
4 neighborhoods that they once were.

5 Neighborhoods are judged first
6 and foremost by the quality of their
7 commercial corridors. They are the
8 thoroughfares that invite or turn away
9 potential homeowners and investment.
10 Philadelphia is an old city with aging
11 building stock. For homeowners and
12 tenants, there are resources available to
13 help them improve their properties,
14 programs such as energy efficiency
15 rebates, weatherization programs, HUD
16 financing, housing counseling services
17 and the like. Unfortunately, few
18 resources like these are extended to the
19 struggling mom and pop businesses on our
20 neighborhood's main streets. These
21 businesses also exist in old and
22 deteriorating properties and lack the
23 resources to make much-needed
24 improvements.

25 An effective and accessible

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2 Storefront Improvement Program for
3 businesses works hand in hand with the
4 City's efforts to keep Philadelphians
5 worm, safe, and invested in their homes.
6 SIP is a holistic approach to
7 neighborhood development by making sure
8 that both residents and businesses have
9 the resources they need to reinvest in
10 their properties and flourish. Without
11 dedicating resources to our neighborhood
12 main streets, the ecology of
13 Philadelphia's redevelopment remains out
14 of balance.

15 On behalf of the merchants of
16 North 5th Street in Olney, I urge City
17 Council and Mayor Nutter to fund the
18 Storefront Improvement Program with
19 General Funds in the coming fiscal year.
20 With those dollars, we can get back to
21 taking down shutters, repairing broken
22 windows, and putting up signs that say
23 "Open for Business."

24 Thank you very much for your
25 generous attention.

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2 COUNCILMAN GOODE: Thank you
3 for your testimony.

4 I have a series of questions.
5 I guess the first one is simply, how
6 would applying General Fund dollars solve
7 this dilemma?

8 MR. BALLOON: I think one of
9 the best illustrations would be comparing
10 the Storefront Improvement Program with
11 the City's Camera Grant Program. One of
12 the biggest challenges is to produce
13 certified payrolls from small
14 neighborhood contractors. The Storefront
15 Improvement Program under its current
16 funding structure requires that certified
17 payroll and the labor classifications
18 from Labor Standards. If we used the
19 City's General Fund money, it would be
20 much easier because the proofs of payment
21 would not require certified payroll. And
22 if we used the General Fund, we could do
23 it more along the lines of the Security
24 Camera Grant Program.

25 COUNCILMAN GOODE: So how would

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2 you not trigger -- wouldn't you still be
3 using CDBG dollars?

4 MS. McCONNELL: I think that's
5 the challenge, is when you use CDBG
6 dollars, it triggers all these federal
7 requirements. If we didn't use any CDBG
8 dollars, took all of the CDBG money that
9 we're currently using for the program and
10 used it for something else -- we got lots
11 of ideas -- and only used City General
12 Fund money, only local money --

13 COUNCILMAN GOODE: So you're
14 suggesting that we simply fund SIP
15 through City dollars as opposed to CDBG
16 dollars?

17 MS. McCONNELL: Exactly.

18 COUNCILMAN GOODE: I thought
19 you were talking about commingling the
20 funds.

21 MS. McCONNELL: No, and you
22 can't actually commingle them, because if
23 you commingle them, you still have to
24 comply with the federal rules, the way
25 that we understand, the way it is

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2 explained to us.

3 COUNCILMAN GOODE: That's what
4 I thought. That's why I asked the
5 original question.

6 COUNCILMAN O'NEILL:
7 Mr. Chairman, because I was going to ask
8 the question on the federal side.

9 I understand what the City
10 dollars do under current conditions, but
11 I also saw 1931, \$2,000, and we're closer
12 to the hundred-year anniversary of that.
13 Usually the federal government is slow,
14 but it's usually not like 75, 80 years
15 slow.

16 Has there been any attempt --
17 community development organizations are
18 also organized nationally. You have the
19 Conference of Mayors, the National League
20 of Cities. We have our own lobbyists.
21 The Commerce Department has access to
22 them in Washington. We have two very
23 seasoned senior Congressmen. We have two
24 Senators that work closely together in a
25 bipartisan way on issues like this that

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2 involve Philadelphia and other cities
3 with storefronts all around the state.
4 It seems to me that there either is a
5 history of trying to raise that number
6 and being unsuccessful or we should be
7 coordinating it somehow.

8 Okay, we'd like some City
9 dollars, but our real goal is to get up
10 into the 21st century from the 18th or
11 whatever \$2,000 was.

12 So could you elaborate on that
13 or enlighten us.

14 MS. McCONNELL: Sure. There
15 are two ways that we could change federal
16 rules to benefit us for this program.
17 One would be to amend the Davis-Bacon
18 Act, which is that act from 1931 that set
19 that limit at \$2,000. The reason why
20 that hasn't happened is because
21 politically there is a lot of opposition
22 to that from organized labor.

23 COUNCILMAN O'NEILL:
24 Davis-Bacon is a hotrod, yeah.

25 MS. McCONNELL: The other way

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2 we could do is to amend the Community
3 Development Act. The Community
4 Development Act is what actually sets the
5 guidelines for the spending of the CDBG
6 funds. The Community Development Act
7 says if you're going -- you have to
8 comply with Davis-Bacon. So we could
9 amend the Community Development Act to
10 say you have to comply with Davis-Bacon,
11 except if your project is of this small
12 scope. And so there is language in the
13 Community Development Act that exempts
14 housing developments of eight or fewer
15 units from Davis-Bacon. So we could do
16 something similar like. If it's just one
17 storefront, it's exempt. And I think
18 that's something we've been discussing,
19 whether we could mount some sort of an
20 effort to get that done in Washington,
21 but getting anything done in Washington
22 positive takes a really, really long
23 time.

24 COUNCILMAN O'NEILL: I
25 understand.

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2 MS. McCONNELL: So it could be
3 years.

4 COUNCILMAN O'NEILL: But
5 there's a short-term interim maybe fix,
6 if you want to call it, or bridge, but
7 this is -- and I agree that Community
8 Development is probably better than
9 Davis-Bacon, because as soon as you
10 mention Davis-Bacon, people start taking
11 sides and throwing things and all. But
12 Community Development is a little
13 different, and you have a good argument.
14 I mean, 1931, \$2,000, still \$2,000.
15 Somebody can understand that. And the
16 importance of this -- the before and
17 after's are all you have to see, and
18 that's every city in Pennsylvania,
19 probably some of the older townships,
20 even some small boroughs that have little
21 downtowns, and then you go all over the
22 country and you have the same thing. So
23 it's not like we're trying to stand out
24 and say, Oh, it's just us. This is
25 everybody.

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2 So hopefully we could get some
3 partners, some interest, and I think we
4 start with our own Commerce Department
5 and our lobbyists. But anyway, I don't
6 want to keep going on that. Pretty
7 obvious.

8 MS. McCONNELL: Thank you.

9 COUNCILMAN O'NEILL: Thank you.

10 COUNCILMAN GOODE: Two
11 questions. What was the average cost of
12 a project before the Davis-Bacon
13 requirement?

14 MS. McCONNELL: I think that
15 might be a question Commerce might be
16 able to answer better than us, but you
17 want to just give examples of some of the
18 projects you've worked on.

19 MR. BALLOON: The previous
20 limits for SIP were 16 and 24. So 16 for
21 a single storefront, 24 for a double or
22 corner property. And most of our
23 estimates came in close to those numbers
24 to do a quality project. It's estimated
25 now that those costs have either doubled

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2 or quadrupled in some cases. When you're
3 doing something very simple like changing
4 an awning, the paperwork requirements
5 that are added can add a lot of cost to
6 the project.

7 COUNCILMAN GOODE: So the
8 average cost before was \$1,600 to \$2,400?

9 MR. BALLOON: Sixteen thousand
10 to 24,000. That be would like a
11 substantial amount of work on the facade.
12 I believe Commerce testified that the
13 average cost of the storefront to them
14 through SIP was 20,000. So that's taking
15 an average.

16 COUNCILMAN GOODE: So the
17 \$20,000 number they gave was before the
18 Davis-Bacon requirement?

19 MR. BALLOON: Yes.

20 MS. McCONNELL: Is that the
21 total cost, but not necessarily the
22 City's contribution? So the cost of the
23 total project might be 20, but the City's
24 contribution isn't 20. The City's
25 contribution will be half of that.

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2 COUNCILMAN GOODE: What are the
3 requirements for participation in the
4 program? Can any business on a
5 commercial corridor participate?

6 MR. BALLOON: It has to be a
7 business that provides goods and services
8 to the neighborhood. So bars are
9 prohibited from participating in the
10 program and businesses that don't offer
11 consumer goods and services, like a
12 construction company or something that
13 wasn't serving neighborhood residents
14 wouldn't be allowed to participate.

15 COUNCILMAN GOODE: So they
16 don't have to be members of a business
17 association?

18 MR. BALLOON: They aren't
19 required to. I'll tell you, practically
20 everyone that we did a storefront for
21 joined our business association.

22 COUNCILMAN GOODE: That was
23 actually the next question. What
24 percentage of the business owners who
25 participate in SIP are actually members

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2 of a business association?

3 MR. BALLOON: I can't speak
4 directly for the City. In my case, I'd
5 say 95 percent in the Tacony
6 neighborhood.

7 COUNCILMAN GOODE: And what
8 type of dues structure is there for those
9 business associations?

10 MR. BALLOON: For us, we offer
11 two levels. One is \$75 and the other is
12 \$200. And those come with differential
13 level of business services, but we call
14 it our Business and then our Business
15 Partners.

16 COUNCILMAN GOODE: Okay. If
17 the program was totally funded through
18 the general operating budget, what other
19 changes might you imagine?

20 MS. McCONNELL: I think that's
21 a good question. One of the things that
22 we had suggested to the Commerce
23 Department before -- and I think this is
24 worth further discussion and dialogue to
25 see if it makes sense -- is, there are

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2 some businesses that have a hard time
3 coming up with their 50 percent match.
4 So the program is a match. It was 50
5 percent. It's now 75 under the new
6 guidelines as a way to kind of sweeten
7 the deal as a result of the tougher
8 guidelines. Some businesses have had a
9 hard time coming up with their portion of
10 it. They have to pay for the whole thing
11 themselves and then get reimbursed. So
12 that period of time, coming up with the
13 full amount and waiting for the
14 reimbursement, has been a challenge for
15 some small businesses. Where we have
16 CDCs that have resources, like in Tacony,
17 for example, they've been able to
18 actually front the businesses their
19 resources to get the projects done, get
20 reimbursed later. We'd be interested in
21 exploring some opportunities to make that
22 process a little bit easier for
23 businesses that really lack access to
24 other forms of capital, such as loans.

25 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Excuse me.

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2 Point of information, Mr. Chairman.

3 With the camera program now,
4 they're looking to actually, instead of
5 having the business owner put out the
6 whole money, pay the contractor directly.
7 So that is something that would make it
8 easier for the business owner, where they
9 pay their portion and then the contractor
10 gets paid their portion from the City.
11 Therefore, alleviating you have to put
12 out the whole amount. And I think that
13 would help the program immensely, because
14 people would not have to come up with the
15 additional dollars.

16 MS. McCONNELL: And Commerce
17 may want to speak to this. I know when
18 we've had conversations about that in the
19 past, they've expressed some concern
20 about you want to make sure that the
21 contractor actually -- there's a
22 relationship between the business owner
23 and the contractor, and there's a
24 negotiation and a discussion there and
25 there's obligations to each other. And

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2 so inserting Commerce in there might make
3 things a little bit more challenging just
4 in terms of like what if the contractor
5 doesn't do the work that they're supposed
6 to do.

7 So that might be something
8 worth -- I don't know if you want to
9 bring Commerce back up and see if they
10 want to respond to that.

11 COUNCILMAN GOODE: Someone from
12 the Commerce Department.

13 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Somebody
14 from Commerce come up.

15 (Witnesses approached witness
16 table.)

17 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Did you
18 hear what we were speaking about?

19 MS. BOYE: Yes, I did, but if
20 you could repeat the question, please.

21 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: It was
22 just that if it's possible where we have
23 the grant approved, right now it is once
24 the project is completed, then the
25 business owner would get reimbursed their

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2 portion of whatever is approved for the
3 grant. We're saying is it possible for
4 Commerce where the owner pays their
5 portion of the project and the portion
6 that was being paid by Commerce go
7 directly to the contractor and not to the
8 grant recipient and, therefore, alleviate
9 him from having to come up with all the
10 money all at once?

11 MS. BOYE: Just as Beth
12 mentioned, there could be issues as to
13 whether the job is done properly and that
14 the business owner is satisfied with the
15 work. So that if we had to pay the
16 contractor directly, then it would make
17 it a little bit more challenging, because
18 then it will be a little bit more effort
19 for us to make sure that the business
20 owner is okay with the work before we
21 make the payment.

22 COUNCILMAN GOODE: Why couldn't
23 the business owner just sign off on it
24 before you make the payment?

25 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Exactly.

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2 They sign off the contract saying the
3 work is completed to satisfaction, they
4 paid their portion, and then the City
5 then pays their portion to the contractor
6 and it's complete.

7 MS. BOYE: We can look into
8 that and see how easily that can be
9 administered. We've done dual-party
10 checks in the past, and there's just a
11 little bit of a challenge in doing that,
12 but it's something that we can look
13 further into it and see if we can
14 mitigate the problems.

15 COUNCILMAN GOODE: That's
16 actually the way the program used to be
17 run, and I'm not going to compare the
18 programs and how it was run in the '90s
19 because there are probably some
20 improvements and maybe some of the ways
21 we did it back in the '90s may be better.
22 But I guess this question is for Commerce
23 and for anyone else on the second panel
24 who wants to answer it. I love the
25 pictures of before and after, but these

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2 are pictures of individual properties. I
3 have no sense of what the entire street
4 looks like. And so in terms of impact,
5 I'm actually concerned about this new
6 program, particularly with the stringent
7 guidelines, in terms of what impact we're
8 actually having on commercial corridors
9 as opposed to just individual properties.

10 MS. BOYE: Well, I mean, this
11 is the beginning of the new rollout. So
12 we don't know exactly what the impacts
13 would be. As I testified before,
14 immediately we've seen that there's been
15 a decrease in the applications that we've
16 received. We do have -- in the past, we
17 have had targeted facade improvements
18 where you can see the impact on the
19 entire corridor. I'm not sure that we
20 have the pictures available, but we can
21 make them available to you if we see
22 them.

23 COUNCILMAN GOODE: Because if
24 you are having that type of impact where
25 it's not just individual properties and

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2 that impact is decreased by changing the
3 regulations, then aside from revisiting
4 the whole program in terms of using
5 general operating dollars, I think you
6 need to revisit earlier in terms of
7 whether your program can be effective
8 now, because improving just one property
9 or two properties in the middle of a
10 strip does help those individual
11 businesses, but does not have the same
12 impact on a commercial strip.

13 MS. BOYE: Well, we have also
14 realized that one -- like I testified
15 before, when one or two businesses do
16 this program, we have other businesses
17 that also follow doing it, as Tacony did.
18 Tacony basically did a whole series of
19 them, and the impact is well seen from
20 the pictures. So because of the way the
21 program is now, you have to have the
22 buy-in from the business owner.

23 COUNCILMAN GOODE: I guess what
24 I'm asking is, but is there buy-in from
25 multiple business owners? How do you

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2 coordinate that?

3 MS. BOYE: The only way we can
4 do that is when we have the targeted, we
5 do it through the business association,
6 and that's what I think earlier on 5th
7 Street. We did a similar targeted facade
8 on 5th Street, and it actually helps us
9 to put the merchants association
10 together.

11 COUNCILMAN GOODE: Which I
12 believe is the more effective approach,
13 to run the program through the business
14 association.

15 MS. BOYE: Yes, but it's not
16 all corridors.

17 COUNCILMAN GOODE: It's not to
18 also require business association
19 membership to the extent you can, and to
20 the extent that we use general operating
21 dollars potentially, I think that we
22 should probably mandate business
23 association membership.

24 MS. BOYE: Yes. It's something
25 that we can look into if we do get the

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2 General Funds. It will be easier -- it
3 will be less onerous, and if we change
4 the program where the burden is less on
5 the business, I guess it's easier. It
6 becomes like a carrot, together to join
7 the business association and then be part
8 of this targeted approach.

9 COUNCILMAN GOODE: So if we
10 were to use general operating budget
11 dollars as opposed to CDBG, you would
12 expect that we could totally redesign the
13 program?

14 MS. BOYE: Yes.

15 COUNCILMAN GOODE: Okay.
16 Anyone want to respond to that question?

17 MR. GREEN: To answer your
18 comment as far as like what this looks
19 like on a block face, how can you tell
20 that it's really affecting the entire
21 block, if you go into Google Street View,
22 you can actually browse between 2008 and
23 2011 and 2014. They've captured footage
24 of the street view. You can see a
25 dramatic difference. One particular

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2 block has seen three of the most blighted
3 properties on that block completely
4 transformed. Now there's a grocery store
5 that looks beautiful. There's another
6 discount store that's been renovated, as
7 well as a cell phone store. Without
8 those three -- if those three properties
9 were still blighted, you'd see far more
10 graffiti, you'd see far more litter on
11 the street because of those broken
12 windows on the block.

13 It also is an exceptional
14 conversation starter. The Storefront
15 Improvement Program is a great
16 conversation starter between the corridor
17 manager and the merchants to say, Hey,
18 you know, your storefront is not only --
19 it could look better, it's also unsafe.
20 Your windows are covered with cigarette
21 ads. If we got you new windows --

22 COUNCILMAN GOODE: I get that.
23 I guess the point I'm trying to make is
24 that the impact of it is much different
25 if you're doing 30 percent, 50 percent,

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2 60 percent, 70 percent. And so if it's
3 coordinated in a way in which you can do
4 more in a concentrated way, it has
5 tremendous impact. Not that it doesn't
6 have impact over a number of years
7 anyway, but if we're redesigning a
8 program, I think it should be designed in
9 a way in which you're actually going in
10 to have major impact so you see the
11 facade of a commercial corridor change.

12 MR. BALLOON: Councilman Goode,
13 you have a lot of experience in this, and
14 community development moves at the speed
15 of trust. So when you get the first
16 storefront done and people see that it's
17 legit, then people start jumping on the
18 bandwagon. That's what we saw when we
19 did our first storefront. Then we did
20 another 14 more, and now we're doing 11.

21 So it's about creating that
22 momentum and the trust so that people
23 believe that the City is actually going
24 to follow through and do it. And the
25 City does use CDBG dollars to support

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2 corridor managers on targeted corridors
3 through the TCMP program. But that's an
4 excellent question.

5 MR. GREEN: And we're seeing
6 this on North 5th Street. We have great
7 momentum, really great momentum leading
8 into the winter. We had just -- like I
9 said, we had 11 SIPs on North 5th Street
10 over the last four years. We have
11 several open cases right now, but they've
12 come to a halt because of these new
13 guidelines. And so the word is out there
14 amongst the merchants within the
15 community about the Storefront
16 Improvement Program.

17 It's hard to come to a business
18 and convince them like, Hey, there's this
19 City program out there that will pay you
20 50 percent, blah, blah, blah, blah. A
21 lot of people are distrustful. You know,
22 it's a hard sell even though it's
23 something that should be easy. But now
24 the word is out, people have received
25 their reimbursements, they want them. It

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2 was a great incentive. So in order keep
3 that momentum going, we do need that
4 bridge of General Fund dollars to take us
5 to when we can get the Davis-Bacon
6 situation worked out.

7 COUNCILMAN GOODE: So should I
8 assume that the funding level of the
9 program now is \$535,000?

10 MS. BOYE: Yes.

11 COUNCILMAN GOODE: Okay.
12 Councilman Squilla.

13 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Is that
14 what it was the previous year?

15 MS. BOYE: Yes. And it just
16 includes a little bit for the Design
17 Collaborative that works with the CDCs as
18 to the design of the storefronts.

19 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: So it's
20 added to include that amount?

21 MS. BOYE: Exactly. Five
22 hundred thousand actually for the work
23 and 34 Design Collaborative.

24 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: But you
25 will as Commerce is willing to work and

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2 to look at maybe different avenues even
3 to make this more enticing if capital
4 dollars are used or City dollars are used
5 more than CDBG? I just think that --
6 I've talked to business owners also that
7 the thing that scares them off is coming
8 up with the whole chunk of change. Some
9 of these guys do not have -- these
10 people, I should say. By "guys," I mean
11 guys and girls -- don't have all that
12 money to put out. So that's a deterrent.
13 Fortunately some of these CDCs are around
14 to help them do that, but not everywhere
15 do we have that.

16 So we need to really look hard
17 at being able to maybe pay directly to a
18 contractor. I'm sure there's legal ways
19 to have a property owner sign off on the
20 finished product. They have to pay them
21 anyway, so they're not going to pay them
22 until it's done, so you don't have to pay
23 them until it's done. So I think we can
24 do it.

25 MS. BOYE: Yes. We'll look

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2 into it. And other ways -- apart from
3 just paying the contractors directly,
4 we'll look for other ways that they don't
5 necessarily have to put all the money up
6 front. It could be spent before we pay
7 them. So we'll look for new, creative
8 ways to make it easier and an easier pill
9 to swallow. We will.

10 COUNCILMAN GOODE: So should I
11 assume that if the annual budget is about
12 a half a million dollars and annual costs
13 is \$20,000, that you do about 25 projects
14 a year?

15 MS. BOYE: I didn't quite get
16 that.

17 COUNCILMAN GOODE: I said if
18 the annual cost of the program is half a
19 million dollars and the average cost of a
20 project is \$20,000, can I assume you do
21 about 25 projects a year?

22 MS. BOYE: No. The average
23 cost is the entire project. We reimburse
24 I think about 7,000 on average, 7,000,
25 8,000 on average.

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2 COUNCILMAN GOODE: What I'm
3 trying to get down to is what number of
4 projects you do a year.

5 MS. BOYE: I think --

6 MR. BALLOON: You were
7 averaging, I think, 93 a year.

8 MS. BOYE: Thank you. Thank
9 you, Alex.

10 COUNCILMAN GOODE: And the 93
11 vary in terms of size?

12 MS. BOYE: Yes.

13 COUNCILMAN GOODE: Some could
14 just be awnings or --

15 MS. BOYE: Yes.

16 COUNCILMAN GOODE: Any other
17 questions for this panel?

18 (No response.)

19 COUNCILMAN GOODE: Thank you
20 very much.

21 Our next panel is small
22 businesses: Saba Tedla, Daniela
23 D'Ambrosio, Ibrahim Sylla, and Peter
24 Merzbacher.

25 (Witnesses approached witness

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2 table.)

3 COUNCILMAN GOODE: Let me note
4 for the record Councilman Kenyatta
5 Johnson is here as well.

6 COUNCILMAN JOHNSON: Thank you,
7 sir.

8 COUNCILMAN GOODE: Good
9 afternoon. Please state your name for
10 the record and proceed with your
11 testimony.

12 MS. D'AMBROSIO: Good
13 afternoon. My name is Daniela
14 D'Ambrosio. Good morning, Chairman Goode
15 and members of City Council. Thank you
16 for affording me the opportunity to speak
17 today. For those of you who don't know
18 me, I am the owner and chef of The
19 Pickled Heron. It's a small BYOB in the
20 Fishtown neighborhood here in
21 Philadelphia. We've been open for just
22 over three years, and we employ seven
23 full and part-time individuals. We
24 source from local farms. We use
25 bicycle-powered composting. We're

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2 involved in all kinds of community
3 activities as well, the upcoming
4 Frankford Avenue Arts Fest. I sit on the
5 Board of the Fishtown Area Business
6 Association, just all kinds of crazy
7 things. I tell you this to show you how
8 invested in the neighborhood I am in
9 hopes that you will listen to my
10 recommendation today.

11 I think we can agree that one
12 driving force in revitalizing our
13 neighborhoods is business, specifically
14 small and new businesses. That's why
15 groups like CDCs and neighborhood
16 associations are so important. They help
17 connect the individuals who are looking
18 to open businesses with the resources
19 that are so important and make things
20 possible. That was definitely the case
21 when I left my position in the corporate
22 world to open a small neighborhood
23 bistro.

24 When you're looking at an
25 opening budget, of course there's things

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2 that are expendable and things that are
3 not. Restaurants need plates, they need
4 stoves, they need chairs. It's
5 impossible to open without them. But
6 they also need signage. They need
7 security systems, paint. And as a
8 restaurateur, these things end up on the
9 low end on your priority list. To a city
10 planner or someone who is looking at the
11 bigger picture, it is essential. It's
12 great if individuals open businesses, but
13 that's just not enough. There needs to
14 be curb appeal to attract those customers
15 and later other businesses to open.

16 What I'm trying to say is the
17 gentrification of an arts corridor like
18 Frankford Avenue where my business sits
19 cannot happen without programs like SIP.
20 The Storefront Improvement Program was
21 introduced to me by New Kensington
22 Community Development Corporation. I
23 think you've heard from Sam today. They
24 helped us navigate the difficult
25 paperwork and secure funds that we used

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2 to improve our facade.

3 The Pickled Heron's original
4 facade budget wasn't for much more than a
5 can of paint and a couple of plants, but
6 with the help of SIP, we were reimbursed
7 100 percent for the permits for our
8 awning, 50 percent of those awnings,
9 which are our only signage. We were
10 reimbursed 50 percent for security
11 cameras, which actually last month helped
12 catch a hit-and-run driver on Frankford
13 Avenue. We have been registered with the
14 SafeCam program. Half of the cost of the
15 security gate to protect our front door
16 and, yes, half the cost of the paint and
17 plants that we had initially planned on.
18 We're covered by the Storefront
19 Improvement Program.

20 I think in the packet that was
21 handed out, you'll see a before and after
22 of the restaurant. We actually did such
23 a good job that in 2012 we were given an
24 award from the Citywide Storefront
25 Challenge for corridor catalyst. Someone

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2 had to go first, and many businesses
3 around us have followed.

4 So I look to you to hopefully
5 save the program and continue funding
6 your area small businesses.

7 Thank you.

8 COUNCILMAN GOODE: Thank you
9 for your testimony.

10 Next witness.

11 MR. PLAKS: Hello. My name is
12 Matthew Plaks. I'm a baker at Philly
13 Bread. We're a bakery up in Olney on the
14 North 5th Street commercial corridor. As
15 our name suggests, we bake bread in
16 Philly.

17 We wanted to apply for the SIP.
18 We have yet to do it. We're an example
19 of one of the businesses where our
20 application actually came to a halt.

21 Our storefront is horrible.
22 The paint is fading, mismatched. The
23 facade is decaying. Just to give you an
24 example, to this day we have people
25 coming into our store just to ask, When

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2 are you guys going to open or what new
3 business is going in here? We've been
4 there for about a year and a half.

5 We're primarily a wholesale
6 bakery right now, and that's because we
7 can't attract any retail traffic. We do
8 a little bit, but that's only for the
9 people who have been brave enough to come
10 up and come in and ask.

11 We really wanted to do
12 something just to make a statement that
13 we are dedicated to the 5th Street area,
14 to Olney. We currently employ about five
15 people from the neighborhood, and that's
16 about five out of eight. And if you
17 include both the founder and myself, who
18 also live in the neighborhood, that
19 number jumps to seven. We want to employ
20 more people, and it's hard to attract
21 people to our storefront because of these
22 issues.

23 We didn't apply and we were --
24 we moved forward with the application in
25 2014, but we stopped when the new

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2 guidelines came out. Quite frankly,
3 we're a small business, but we're growing
4 incredibly fast and we need all hands on
5 deck just to stay afloat, just to keep
6 the product rolling, and with these new
7 guidelines, it's just too much for a
8 business like ourself to follow through
9 and the risk is too great if a
10 subcontractor or someone else doesn't
11 supply a certified pay stub. We just
12 couldn't afford that risk or the time
13 that it would have taken to ensure that
14 these things follow through. I think
15 we're one of probably many examples of
16 stores that would better our storefront,
17 would better the neighborhood if only
18 these funds were more accessible.

19 I just thank you for your time,
20 and that's it.

21 COUNCILMAN GOODE: Thank you
22 for your testimony.

23 Our next witness.

24 MS. TEDLA: My name is Sada
25 Tedla and I own a restaurant called Aksum

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2 on Baltimore Avenue. We have been around
3 for the last -- we're approaching our
4 fifth year. I personally attribute part
5 of our success due to our storefront. We
6 made a significant investment. We spent
7 over 30,000, and we were reimbursed
8 12,000. We were able to attract people
9 who are passing through the Baltimore
10 Avenue to go home or commuting that saw
11 our storefront, and it appealed to them
12 enough either they would stop then or
13 they would recognize we are there. So I
14 personally am a great supporter of the
15 program and I advocate for other
16 businesses in our corridor to utilize the
17 grant.

18 Personally we were one of the
19 few people who did take a leap of faith
20 and made a huge investment in doing our
21 storefront, and it was worthwhile. The
22 cost ended up being, the total investment
23 that we make to open the restaurant,
24 about -- close to 30 percent of our
25 investment was in our storefront, but I

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2 don't think we would have made as
3 significant investment if it wasn't for
4 this program, at least from how I feel
5 now in retrospect.

6 Additionally, there were other
7 businesses that of recent have went
8 through the program, and I believe
9 somebody has to make the first move in
10 order for the entire block to make this
11 change, and I'm glad we were one of the
12 first to have done this.

13 In terms of the changes that
14 are being made in terms of how it's
15 administered, I think it's going to
16 hinder other businesses to not
17 participate or find a good contractor who
18 is willing to do such a documentation of
19 their labor and recording. So I think if
20 I was to do it again, I think I would be
21 turned off by it personally. And also
22 contractors wouldn't engage in working
23 with us as well. So I think it's
24 definitely -- it needs to be reevaluated
25 in making sure that it's beneficial for

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2 the businesses to participate in this
3 program.

4 Thank you for your time, and I
5 hope this program does continue from here
6 on.

7 MR. SYLLA: Hi. Good morning.
8 My name is Ibrahim Sylla. I'm a part
9 owner and an operator of Abbi Prints. We
10 are located at 60th between Spruce and
11 Pine in West Philly. We actually been
12 open for about two years now, and at
13 first -- actually, I provided some
14 pictures to see the changes of front door
15 improvement.

16 As you all know, I mean, small
17 business, we face a lot of
18 (unintelligible) of situations, such as
19 foot traffic and to generate our sale
20 most likely or to actually advertise
21 ourself to even the walk-in people, and
22 those others thought that actually we
23 have been able to increase after being a
24 part of this program. It have help us
25 actually literally to make a drastic

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2 change as far the presentation goes,
3 which is the front facade of the store
4 most likely.

5 I can testify myself that since
6 we were part of the program and we have
7 changed the front, our traffic have
8 increased 30 percent and also you have --
9 also help us to actually increase 25
10 percent on the sale from the prior year,
11 which was literally hard for us to do
12 when we first actually were in the
13 neighborhood because of the signage
14 situation, where not even knowing. Most
15 people were walking by and I literally
16 have to come outside and stop them to let
17 them know, yeah, the new business is
18 printing job and for people to come in.
19 But as soon as we have made those
20 changes, things drastically changed.

21 And I think the program should
22 continue and should be a little more
23 flexible to a lot of people, like she
24 mentioned earlier. I do know that we had
25 to go through a little difficult time for

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2 us to get our money, to get the
3 reimbursement, but we went through it
4 because we actually believe into the
5 program, and it help us to actually
6 achieve whatever that I just mentioned
7 earlier.

8 So thank you for your time.

9 COUNCILMAN GOODE: Thank you
10 for your testimony.

11 MR. SYLLA: I hope the program
12 continue.

13 COUNCILMAN GOODE: I don't have
14 any questions. Thank you very much.

15 The next panel is contractors:
16 John Nolen.

17 (Witness approached witness
18 table.)

19 COUNCILMAN GOODE: Good
20 afternoon. Please state your name for
21 the record and proceed with your
22 testimony.

23 MR. NOLEN: My name is John
24 Nolen. I'm the owner of Aztec Signs and
25 Graphics on Torresdale Avenue. I was

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2 asked to come before the board. I have
3 several years of experience with the SIP
4 program. I've been involved in over two
5 dozen SIP projects - the Tacony project,
6 Frankford, Old City District, University.

7 I was asked to come here today
8 because as a contractor, I've been
9 involved in both being a subcontractor
10 for some contractors that have bid
11 projects and done the design and
12 installation only as Aztec Signs. With
13 the changes in the program recently, I've
14 been forced to go outside of what I can
15 fabricate in order to hire subcontractors
16 with the prevailing wage.

17 Aztec Signs has been in
18 business for 23 years. I employ six
19 local people, and I've been a member of
20 the community and the community
21 organizations. As soon as that happened,
22 we pretty much have a standard of what to
23 do on a Storefront Improvement Program.
24 The awning package that we do and design
25 to the criteria is usually based on a

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2 pretty simple square foot. As soon as
3 the changes came about, my awnings remain
4 the same. The installation and having to
5 do an outside contractor has skyrocketed
6 the cost.

7 We're fully capable of
8 producing the items that we put up. I am
9 licensed and bonded with the City of
10 Philadelphia. Some of their new changes
11 with insurance regulations, I have to
12 supply insurance regulations, workmen
13 comp regulations every month to get
14 through the permitting process. With all
15 those things in step, I still cannot do
16 some of the projects that are brought
17 forward. One, because of the prevailing
18 wage; another because of the large amount
19 and the payment process of that, being a
20 small family-owned business.

21 The Tacony project was in
22 excess of \$20,000 worth of awnings. For
23 Aztec to wait 30, 60, 90 days for payment
24 when the contractor is finished was just
25 not a possibility. If the availability

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2 of funds were not up front from the CDC
3 as we moved along on the projects, that
4 project would have come to a halt.

5 I've seen firsthand the change
6 in the business. Like I said, being on
7 Torresdale Avenue up in Wissinoming, the
8 Tacony area is only three minutes away.
9 I've seen the influence that the
10 Storefront Improvement Program has done
11 to the other businesses in that area.
12 That one mile, one and a half mile
13 stretch from three facades to five
14 facades to five on one block has made a
15 tremendous impact in the area. There is
16 more foot traffic. There is more
17 commercial business. It is definitely a
18 draw from the vacancies that were there
19 four years ago, like Alex had said.
20 There was a 70 percent vacancy rate on
21 Torresdale Avenue. That's been
22 tremendously decreased.

23 So with these drawbacks and the
24 changes in there, I had talked with
25 several of the CDCs back in December and

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2 said, I can't bid. My hands are tied at
3 this point, unfortunately. I can bid the
4 job, but I can't get the subcontractors
5 at prevailing rate to even respond to my
6 calls.

7 It's a very simple process. I
8 have ten jobs to do this week. I can do
9 nine of them. I can get a deposit, I can
10 get the job up, and I can get paid. This
11 one I have to wait 60 days, I have to get
12 subcontractors to take care of. It's
13 easier for me just to push that one to
14 the side and not take any bids on it, and
15 that's what I seem to be finding. So my
16 last four or five projects I had to step
17 away from based on that.

18 Thank you.

19 COUNCILMAN GOODE: For the
20 record, since you have done a number of
21 these projects, what is the difference in
22 the wage rate for subcontractors?

23 MR. NOLEN: I have a \$32 an
24 hour labor rate inside the shop for
25 fabrication. As a sign company, I need

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2 to call to find out on which project
3 which labor rate is affecting me. I can
4 go anywhere between 64.50 an hour for
5 journeyman carpentry to anywhere in the
6 \$90 range for a certified electrician.
7 So it's either doubled or tripled my rate
8 for something that was pretty much of a
9 standard 16-foot storefront is \$2,200.
10 That's how we manage to do five, six,
11 eight locations. That was on --

12 COUNCILMAN GOODE: So your
13 average wage rate before that was?

14 MR. NOLEN: So my wage as --

15 COUNCILMAN GOODE: Is 32?

16 MR. NOLEN: -- an independent
17 is \$32 an hour.

18 COUNCILMAN GOODE: Thank you.

19 Any other questions?

20 (No response.)

21 COUNCILMAN GOODE: Thank you
22 very much.

23 MR. NOLEN: Thank you.

24 COUNCILMAN GOODE: Can the
25 Commerce Department approach the witness

1 3/11/15 - COMMERCE - RES. 150082

2 table one final time.

3 (Witnesses approached witness
4 table.)

5 COUNCILMAN GOODE: Just one
6 final question. Is this program better
7 administered with general operating
8 dollars than CDBG dollars?

9 MS. BOYE: Yes. Mostly any of
10 our programs will be more easily -- well,
11 better, much more better, but more easily
12 administered with General Funds.

13 COUNCILMAN GOODE: I understand
14 in general there are more regulations
15 with CDBG than the general operating
16 dollars. I'm saying more specifically
17 should this program be administered with
18 general operating dollars rather than
19 CDBG dollars --

20 MS. BOYE: Yes.

21 COUNCILMAN GOODE: -- for the
22 type of impact you're trying to do?

23 MS. BOYE: For the type of
24 impact, yes, and to continue what we've
25 been doing, yes.

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2 COUNCILMAN GOODE: Thank you.

3 Thank you very much.

4 Is there anyone else to testify
5 on this resolution?

6 (Witness approached witness
7 table.)

8 MR. JEICE: It's still morning,
9 right?

10 COUNCILMAN GOODE: It's
11 actually afternoon now. Good afternoon,
12 sir.

13 MR. JEICE: My name is Warner
14 Jeice (ph). I'm with the Department of
15 Labor Standards for the City of
16 Philadelphia here. I've been listening
17 to the meetings and I'm kind of a little
18 bit disturbed with the rates that these
19 guys are saying under the prevailing
20 rate. It's not just the rates. It
21 depends on how the contract is written
22 and the work that they're performing that
23 classifies the rate of pay that they're
24 going to be paying. So the contract has
25 to be written right to exclude a lot of

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2 the over-costs, because it is a higher
3 cost now that prevailing language is in
4 here.

5 But the reason why we
6 implemented prevailing wage language in
7 it is because it was commingling of funds
8 when you take federal dollars and other
9 agency money and put it together to do
10 work on a business, and then if you're
11 going to do more than just the signs or
12 more than anything else, then you're
13 jumping into another category. That's
14 the problem that we're having.

15 But we have reached out to
16 every contractor to work for the
17 certified payrolls. All we want is
18 certified payrolls. Not only do we ask
19 for that, the reason is because we want
20 to make sure that all the contractors are
21 licensed with the City of Philadelphia,
22 so everybody pays their fair share of tax
23 dollars to the City. You just can't --
24 once you get somebody some money, they
25 may go and get all these fly-by-night

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2 contractors, and what happens? Same
3 thing that might have happened over there
4 on 22nd and Market, you know, the
5 building collapse.

6 So we do a lot of little things
7 beyond our scope of Labor Standards work
8 just to cover the City.

9 COUNCILMAN GOODE: So are you
10 suggesting you would not have oversight
11 if they were general operating dollars?

12 MR. JEICE: Excuse me?

13 COUNCILMAN GOODE: Are you
14 suggesting that you would not have
15 oversight if they were general operating
16 dollars?

17 MR. JEICE: Pretty much.

18 COUNCILMAN GOODE: Why are you
19 suggesting that?

20 MR. JEICE: Because they don't
21 submit no certified payrolls. You know
22 what I mean? Pretty much they won't.
23 Once you go out of the Labor Standards
24 guidelines, if the general dollar is over
25 the amount, then we won't be able to see

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2 how much they're paying. Like they can
3 use -- which is not illegal to use a
4 laborer to do electrician work.

5 COUNCILMAN GOODE: We've
6 already said that if general operating
7 dollars were applied to replace CDBG
8 dollars, that there would be a redesign
9 of the program. I don't think anyone has
10 said what that redesign would be yet.

11 MR. JEICE: No.

12 COUNCILMAN GOODE: Okay?

13 MR. JEICE: Nobody.

14 COUNCILMAN GOODE: No one has
15 determined what that new program would
16 look like yet.

17 MR. JEICE: No, I don't believe
18 so, unless my Director knows.

19 COUNCILMAN GOODE: Okay. Thank
20 you for your testimony.

21 Is there anyone else to
22 testify?

23 (No response.)

24 COUNCILMAN GOODE: Seeing none,
25 the hearing of this resolution is

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2 recessed to the call of the Chair.

3 Thank you very much.

4 (Committee on Commerce and
5 Economic Development concluded at 12:20
6 p.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, and that this is a true and correct transcript of same.

MICHELE L. MURPHY
RPR-Notary Public

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