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FY26 Budget Hearing: H.O.M.E. Initiative, Morning Session

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Hearing Date: April 23, 2025

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Headlines

- Council is in broad agreement about the need for a housing program to address the housing crisis in Philadelphia but raised concerns about:
 - Reduced focused on Philadelphians with lowest incomes (from 2018 plan)
 - Financing, including costs of the bond issue, whether the money will be spent in a timely manner and what the other \$200 million of funding will be
 - Protecting community input in the development process
 - Protecting the investment so it benefits the public, not private developers (through a public bank, public land trusts, etc) and does not lead to gentrification
 - Insuring that Black and Brown Philadelphians benefit from construction jobs created by the project
 - Council did not voice any concerns relating to the sustainability initiatives outlined in the HOME plan

Quotes

See the linked [YouTube recording](#) to follow timestamps:

- [00:55:42] Jamie Gauthier: “This program must be transformational in it’s impact...right now, it feels diffuse, with dozens of different programs listed without a clear throughline or sense of spending priority. We’re sprinkling a lot of money in many different directions”.
- [01:18:44] Kendra Brooks: “Will the buildings constructed or preserved with public

dollars under HOME plan be at least 51% owned by the public?”

- [02:52:22] Kenyatta Johnson: “If we borrow...how do we spend this money in the appropriate amount of time?”

Observations

- First, except for a slight reference to weatherization programs coming under the auspices of the Philadelphia Energy Authority, I heard no references to any of the sustainability initiatives in the plan.
- There’s clearly disagreement between the Mayor and some Councilmembers about the extent to which the plan should target the lowest income Philadelphians. How will this resolve?
- To what extent is it possible for a plan like this to address/provide guarantees about Council’s concerns about employment for Black and Brown Philadelphians and protections against gentrification and predatory lending and development? We need to see the Mayor’s legislative proposals which are supposed to be forthcoming on Thursday...to Council, perhaps not to the public.

Notes

Department: [Planning and Urban Development](#)

Total Budget Request: [\\$2 billion](#) proposal

- \$800 million (bond issue) request for FY26
- \$1 billion value from City-owned lots and land
- \$200 million to come from “other state, local and federal government funds”

Budget priorities: Create 30,000 new housing units

Panelists:

- Tiffany W. Thurman, Chief of Staff
- Angela D. Brooks, Chief Housing and Urban Development Officer
- Jessie Lawrence, Director, Department of Planning & Development
- Ira Goldstein, consultant from Reinvestment Fund
- Rob Dubow, Finance Director

- John Mondlak, Deputy Director of Planning

Hearings Recap (1-3 paragraphs):

Mayor's \$2 Billion Housing Plan Faces Council Scrutiny

City Council members questioned key aspects of the Mayor's ambitious \$2 billion HOME proposal during yesterday's hearing. The plan—which includes \$800 million in bonds costing taxpayers up to \$69 million annually for two decades—aims to create 30,000 new housing units within four years while streamlining approvals and enhancing home repair programs.

While councilmembers acknowledged Philadelphia's housing crisis, they pressed officials on whether the plan would truly serve low-income residents, provide equitable job opportunities, prevent gentrification, and preserve community input. Several expressed doubts about the city's capacity to effectively deploy such massive funding.

Chief of Staff Tiffany Thurman, Director of Planning and Development Jessie Lawrence, and other panellists offered varying levels of detail in their responses, noting that additional legislation would be needed to fully implement the Mayor's vision.

Councilmember Questions & Discussion (select 3-5):

Councilmember: Jamie Gauthier

Question: The Councilmember asked about whether the scope of the program would make it diffuse and limit its impact and why it serves fewer lowest-income Philadelphians than the 2018 housing plan.

Discussion:

- Jessie Lawrence and Tiffany Thurman responded by reiterating that the times are different today, and that the Mayor is intentionally focussing on low and moderate income Philadelphians, in an effort to “grow the pie.” While they stressed (here and in responses to Councilmembers Landau and O’Rourke) that the plan was “data driven” and responding to the current market, they also explained that the

plan intentionally addresses the needs of a wider range of income levels.

Councilmember: Kendra Brooks

Question: Councilmember Brooks asked several questions aimed at how the program would protect the public interest, through majority-public ownership of projects, and through potential public banking options for low-income borrowers. (Councilmember Ahmad later also referenced concerns about predatory banking.) Council President Johnson added a question about the use of public land trusts for the same purpose.

Discussion:

- In their responses, the panel referenced several projects which are models for their work, including the development at [13th and Bainbridge](#), where the city leased the land. Ira Goldstein, of the Reinvestment Fund, explained that the city is not becoming a mortgage lender, but that the lending component of the program is based on a long-standing, effective program in Massachusetts.

Councilmember: Bass

Question: Councilmember Bass asked about participation from Black and Brown folks, noting that in the past, public works jobs were dominated by white, suburban or out-of-state workers from New Jersey. (Later Councilmember Young referenced this when he asked about the role union investors would play in shaping the program and whether unions share the city's goal of employing more Black and Brown Philadelphians.)

Discussion:

- Jessie Lawrence responded that the program will provide access to bonding; and contractor training and will prioritize opportunity to Black and Brown developers. There was some back-and-forth with the Councilmember and Camille Duchausse about what it means to have Black directors of the project, with Bass skeptical, noting “we’ve had Black folks at the table for a long time now and we haven’t moved the goal post at all” (02:26:15), and a response from Thurman that we have Black leaders now in key decision-making positions, not just at the table.

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