

**Philadelphia Parks Alliance Testimony to  
City Council on April 27, 2011**

**Lauren Bornfriend, Executive Director**

Good Afternoon President Verna, Members of City Council and fellow citizens. My name is Lauren Bornfriend and I am the Executive Director of the Philadelphia Parks Alliance. I am here today with Doris Gwaltney who is a Board Member of the Parks Alliance and the President of Carroll Park Neighbors.

Together advocates, City Council and the Administration have made much progress over the last several years in reforming Philadelphia's parks and recreation - by creating transparency, accountability, strong governance, visionary leadership, and legislation addressing the protection and use of parkland.

Unfortunately, at the same time, after decades of budget cuts to our Parks and Recreation, funding has fallen even further behind. In spite of proposed and short lived budget increases, the combined operating budget for parks and recreation has been cut by seven million dollars since Fiscal Year 2008. Seven million dollars is an enormous loss for a department that was already lagging behind other city departments and had already been cut to the bone. In fact, in 1985 the parks budget alone of \$12.6 million was more than it is today and that doesn't account for inflation.

We understand that recent economic challenges have delayed increases, but we also know that strategic investments in Philadelphia's parks and recreation, especially at this challenging time, will pay dividends for years to come.

Commissioner DiBerardinis and his team have done an excellent job in leveraging foundation, corporate and institutional investment, but there is only so long and so much that private funders will contribute if the City doesn't do its part. These funders are not willing to subsidize municipal funding. They are however, extremely interested in dynamic public-private partnerships that show returns.

The unique role that healthy vibrant parks and recreation play in the creation of sustainable 21<sup>st</sup> century cities is now at the center of economic, political and policy discussions taking place across the United States and abroad. Parks are recognized as essential tools for community and economic development; cultural and environmental revitalization; healthy, fit citizens; retention and attraction of residents, businesses and tourists; protection of land and water; youth development; crime prevention; education, and of course, quality of life.

The base of citizens and organizations in Philadelphia who are clear about why parks and recreation matter is growing fast. We are organized and we will continue to take action to improve, protect and revitalize these extraordinary assets.

On behalf of the Philadelphia Parks Alliance and our many supporters and partners, we ask you to invest in our parks and recreation. **Please do not cut one more cent from their budget and begin to work with us now to reinstate budget increases in Fiscal Year 2013.** The Parks Alliance pledges to stand with you, the Administration, Department leaders, and stakeholders to leverage opportunities to fully fund our parks and recreation so that every park and facility in every neighborhood is safe, clean and well maintained.