

**City Council Budget Testimony**  
**Department of Parks and Recreation**  
**April 12, 2010**

- Good morning, Council President Verna and members of Council. I am Michael DiBerardinis, Commissioner Department of Parks and Recreation for the City of Philadelphia. With me are Susan Slawson, Recreation Commissioner, and Mark Focht, Executive Director Fairmount Park. It's a pleasure being here today.
- I would like to start my testimony by thanking Councilwoman Reynolds-Brown and Councilman Clarke for their vision and leadership around the Parks and Recreation merger. I would also like to thank Mayor Nutter and the Commission on Parks and Recreation for their continued support, work, and leadership. I would especially like to thank our dedicated Parks and Recreation staff. As we plan for an exciting future, our Parks and Recreation staff continues to provide great work in the form of quality programming and care of our natural assets and hundreds of facilities.
- I appear before you today to present our proposed Operating Budget for Fiscal Year 2011 which includes a general fund obligation of \$49,828,904 and grants revenue of \$10,260,164. The Class 100 request of \$39,078,562 sustains the merged department's authorized level of 689 general fund/full-time positions. The balance of \$10,750,342 is contained in classes 200, 300, 400, and 500.
- Our proposed Operating Budget for FY11 represents an increase in class 100 of \$2,600,000 and class 200 of \$710,705 compared to our FY10 budget which will go to support the operation of the Robin Hood Dell and implementation of the department's strategic initiatives, including increased tree plantings.
- The Department of Parks and Recreation is committed to supporting the Administration's goal of minority, woman, and disabled-owned business participation in City contracting. Based on the available contracting opportunities, the Department of Parks and Recreation FY11 participation goal is 12%.
- With its hundreds of recreation facilities and over 11,000 acres of park land woven throughout the City of Philadelphia, Fairmount Park and the Recreation Department are community resources that serve pre-school aged to senior citizens daily in each and every neighborhood in our city.
- Once Fairmount Park and the Recreation Department are merged to form the new Department of Parks and Recreation, approximately 13% of the land in the City of Philadelphia will fall under the care of this newly created department. Given this

importance, the process to form the new Department of Parks and Recreation has been thoughtful, deliberate, and most importantly public.

- As Commissioner, I am pleased to provide you with an update of where we stand to date.
- Since my appointment in April 2009, thousands of individuals have been engaged in discussions about the formation of the Department of Parks and Recreation along with the development of our vision, mission, goals, and strategic objectives.
- Our shared vision to become the nation's premier park and recreation system is something we must collectively strive to reach together over time.
- Our mission to offer beautiful natural landscapes, historic resources, environmental programs, and parks along with high quality recreation centers and programs holds true to the guiding principles of Fairmount Park and the Recreation Department.
- Our goals and strategic objectives are the measurable steps and investments we need to make in order to reach our vision to become the nation's premier park and recreation system.
- Over the course of 17 community and partner meetings held throughout the City, many attended by City Council members and staff, in addition to staff meetings, surveys, emails, correspondence, and conversation, we heard a lot of excitement and support around the new Department of Parks and Recreation and the vision, mission, goals, and strategic objectives.
- But we have also clearly heard that as we strive for a better future we also need to continue our focus on the day-to-day responsibilities. This includes maintaining parks and recreation facilities which are safe, clean, attractive, fully functional and accessible while caring for the environment and promoting programs for all Philadelphians.
- Our FY11 budget presents not only a newly formed Department of Parks and Recreation, it also details how our new department will be in service to our mission, vision, and strategic objectives and the high priority we place on maintaining a unified Parks and Recreation system which is safe, clean, and ready to use for all Philadelphians.
- Once adopted, a merged departmental budget will allow us to proceed into the implementation phase of the merger. As Commissioner, I have already announced appointments to lead positions in each of the new department's major divisions. To further inform and guide our efforts toward integrating the new department's daily operations, an eighteen month implementation plan and schedule will be developed. This implementation schedule will include numerous opportunities for staff, stakeholder, partner, and City

Council engagement and feedback. We look forward to sharing this proposed plan and schedule this summer.

- Regarding other merger benchmarks, the map of Department of Parks and Recreation geographic management regions has already been shared with staff, stakeholders, partners, and City Council. The process of populating the new departmental organization chart is also underway and we expect this work to be completed over the next few months. We take this responsibility seriously and will continue to proceed with the advice of the Office of Human Resources, the Office of Labor Relations, relevant labor organizations, our staff, and stakeholders.
- This approach and timeline toward our own merger effort is validated and confirmed by best practices, research, discussions with merger experts, and visits to other cities.
- Even as we engage in the enormous task of merging these two departments, we are able to celebrate numerous successes and accomplishments which clearly show the increased value of the new Department of Parks and Recreation for our citizens.
- Building off the early success of the Mayor's "Splash and Summer Fund," and with the support of numerous community and business partners, the Mayor and the Department of Parks and Recreation have made a commitment to our community to open all operational City pools (69 of 72 pools) for the summer season.
- The Department of Parks and Recreation is partnering with the Philadelphia Phillies and Major League Baseball to create the Philadelphia Urban Youth Academy, which is set to launch this summer. This partnership will utilize renovated fields and facilities at both Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR) Park and Marian Anderson Recreation Center to help inner-city youth reach their fullest potential on and off the field by providing quality instruction and training and educational assistance through a variety of year-round programs. Working towards the Mayor's goal of sending more Philadelphia residents to college, the Philadelphia Urban Youth Academy will also offer college placement assistance and career development through experiential learning opportunities.
- The Department of Parks and Recreation has partnered internally and externally to make significant investments in each City ice rink facility. In 2010, the department will commit to running a seven-day a week operation at all ice rinks to expand public skating. This represents an additional full-day of public and community skating at all City ice rinks.
- In support of Greenworks Philadelphia, the Department of Parks and Recreation is working collaboratively to support the very ambitious Greenworks' target of planting 300,000 new trees by 2015, the Department of Parks and Recreation is working closely with our long-standing partner, the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society (PHS), to develop new approaches

to collaboration in which City government aligns and engages external partners and citizens in working towards this target.

- We have been actively working with the Parks and Recreation Commission's Land Use Committee around the issue of land use and preservation. We have heard this is a priority for many people and we fully support this work. The Land Use Committee has prepared a draft of a proposed ordinance related to Parks and Recreation land and facilities use. Over the summer, the committee will further review this draft language with the full Parks and Recreation Commission, members of the Administration, interested City Council members.
- The Department of Parks and Recreation is committed to ensuring our children and youth are safe, connected to their communities, and ready to learn. The Department will provide leadership in developing uniform standards and evaluation measures to increase the quality of programs but also as a strategy of building a coherent youth development system to support, coordinate and sustain "out of school time" programs throughout the City. This proposed budget will allow the Department of Parks and Recreation to support a wide variety of programming and initiatives, including outdoor recreational activities, for children, youth, teens, and families.
- In closing, we have made tremendous progress to date but the work is not over. We will continue to engage the community, internal and external partners, our staff, and City Council in this ongoing process.
- Should any Councilmember wish to engage in further discussion on any of these matters, my staff and I are happy to meet with Council members at their convenience. Thank you for the opportunity to discuss these important matters with you today and I look forward to your questions.