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Title: Authorizing the Committee on Parks, Recreation and Cultural Affairs to hold hearings to examine the state of Philadelphia’s parks and recreation system and, particularly, the causes of Philadelphia's precipitous drop in the Trust for Public Land's national rankings of park systems.

Sponsors: Councilmember Johnson

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Authorizing the Committee on Parks, Recreation and Cultural Affairs to hold hearings to examine the state of Philadelphia’s parks and recreation system and, particularly, the causes of Philadelphia's precipitous drop in the Trust for Public Land's national rankings of park systems.

WHEREAS, The Trust for Public Land (TPL) is a U.S. nonprofit organization with a mission to "create parks and protect land for people, ensuring healthy, livable communities for generations to come." Each year the organization reviews city park systems across the nation and ranks them based upon their access, investment, amenities, acreage and equity; and

WHEREAS, Philadelphia’s 2022 ranking by the TPL dropped to 32 among 100 cities, falling from 19th in 2021 and 15th in 2020; and

WHEREAS, Philadelphia’s parks are underfunded compared with those in other major cities. Among the 100 biggest U.S. cities, three-quarters have more funding per capita than Philadelphia. According to the 2022 report, Philadelphia is spending \$73 per resident on parks and recreation compared with \$138 in 2020 and \$112 in 2021. Philadelphia even falls below the national average of \$98 per resident; and

WHEREAS, The drop in ranking was partly due to a decrease in funding after the COVID-19 pandemic hit which caused the Parks department a 20% cut according to Commissioner Ott Lovell. Concurrently there was a 50% increase in park users during the pandemic, further straining the department’s ability to provide the same access and resources needed as even before the pandemic; and

WHEREAS, The importance of parks and public space throughout the pandemic was innumerable as they not only provided safe spaces and entertainment, but also became vaccine and COVID testing sites and opened recreation centers to children when schools were closed; and

WHEREAS, During a recent hearing regarding the fiscal year 2023 budget, it was revealed that the Parks department budget is still below the pre pandemic budget by roughly 5 million dollars. This continued deficit in the department's budget impacts their ability to staff recreation centers and fund needed programs and services; and

WHEREAS, The 2022 TPL report also analyzed whether local parks departments are doing enough to mitigate climate change through park space. Parks can help to reduce urban heat, mitigate flooding, and sequester carbon, which means funding for parks can combat climate change. Although the organization found that 85% of cities are adapting parks and recreation facilities to address climate change, they noted that the areas with the least amount of park space are more often communities of color and low-income neighborhoods; and

WHEREAS, The report also noted inequitable access to the parks for communities of color and low income neighborhoods. Asian and Hispanic neighborhoods have less park space than the city median, while white neighborhoods have much more. Overall residents in neighborhoods that are not predominantly white have access to 28% less park space per person than those in mainly white neighborhoods. Residents in low-income neighborhoods have access to 42% less park space per person than those in high-income neighborhoods; and

WHEREAS Philadelphia parks provide intrinsic environmental, aesthetic, and recreation benefits to our cities. They provide access to recreational opportunities, increase property values, spur local economies, combat crime, and protect cities from environmental impact. It is critical that we as a city prioritize fully funding Philadelphia's parks to ensure equitable access and enjoyment for all; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, THAT THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, Authorizes the committee on Parks, Recreation and Cultural Affairs to hold hearings to examine the state of Philadelphia's parks and recreation system and, particularly, the causes of Philadelphia's precipitous drop in the Trust for Public Land's national rankings of park systems.