City Council
Chief Clerk's Office
402 City Hall
Philadelphia, PA 19107

Legislation Text

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Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the founding of the Temple University Urban Archives and honoring the essential role that the Urban Archives have played in preserving a record of Philadelphia's history and culture.

WHEREAS, Temple University Urban Archives are a collection of primary resources that document and illuminate the social, political, economic, and geographic development in the City of Philadelphia during the 19th, 20th, and 21st centuries; and

WHEREAS, The Urban Archives is one of the oldest and most expansive collections of documents and resources dedicated to local history, and represents the fruit of a pioneering genre of social history that prioritized documenting and studying the development of grassroots organizations and the lives of neighborhood-based actors in order to comprehensively understand urban American life. Therefore, the creation, development, and curation of this repository is historical in and of itself; and

WHEREAS, The Urban Archives are composed of a collection of records, documents, letters, meeting notes, newspapers, pictures, and videos that feature events related to social welfare, social work, urban development, community politics, and other urban affairs-related activity in the City of Philadelphia and across Southeastern Pennsylvania; and

WHEREAS, Department of History Professor Herbert Bass, later joined by Professors Allen Davis, Morris Vogel, Fredric Miller, developed the archives in 1967 as an effort to examine history from the "bottom up" and to preserve resources that shed light on the rich history of communities across the City of Philadelphia; and

WHEREAS, The Urban Archives are nationally recognized for their meticulous documentation of neighborhood institutions and ethnic organizations, creating a historical record of the diverse set of civic-minded groups that have weaved the sociopolitical and economic fabric in communities across the City of Philadelphia. The documentation of such efforts has preserved typically-discarded materials from vibrant community organizations that flourished throughout the twentieth century, and does justice to the contributions of local changemakers; and

WHEREAS, The Urban Archives' "Discovering Community History Project", funded by the Pennsylvania Humanities Council in the late 1970s, pioneered a novel way of examining neighborhood history and community relations. Rather than promoting a "top down" approach of teaching people about the history of their surroundings, Temple historians collected civic association documents and dozens of oral histories in order to understand how Philadelphians construct and make sense of their own local history; and

WHEREAS, The Urban Archives notably contain four million images and seven million news clippings from the *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, once the nation's largest evening newspaper, which documented life in the City of Philadelphia from 1847 until 1982; and

WHEREAS, The Urban Archives also contain essential documents from key civil rights groups and institutions

such as the AIDS Library, the Gray Panthers, the Jewish Labor Committee, the Philadelphia Police Advisory Board, and the Philadelphia Fellowship Commission, as well as the Philadelphia Chapters of the AFL-CIO, the NAACP, Planned Parenthood, and the Urban League; and

WHEREAS, Prominent collections within the Urban Archives include the Octavia Hill Society, which supported the management and sanitation of housing for black and immigrant tenants; the Housing Association of Delaware Valley, which worked to improve working class housing conditions; the Settlement Music School, the largest community arts school in Philadelphia that has a history of providing music training to those with financial needs; the Nationalities Service Center, which provides information and guidance to immigrants and refugees in Philadelphia; Weavers Way Co-Op, one of the oldest food co-ops in the country; and a number of neighborhood-based chapters of the YMCA and YWCA; and

WHEREAS, The Urban Archives have attracted students and scholars from across the nation, serving as an invaluable resource for those studying urban life and social history; and

WHEREAS, The Urban Archives have continually made resources more accessible and relevant through the digitization of archival material, the screenings of audiovisual materials for the general public, and the development of digital exhibitions such as *Civil Rights in a Northern City: Philadelphia*, which features online documents, newspaper clippings, and photographs relating to key events in Philadelphia's Civil Rights history, including the fight to desegregate Girard College; and

WHEREAS, Fifty years after its creation, the Urban Archives continue to grow and to document the City of Philadelphia's dynamic history, most recently acquiring the records from Occupy Philadelphia and the Philadelphia Women's March. The Urban Archives has also acquired key documents from the recently closed Society Hill Playhouse, as well as the Prince Music Theater, speaking to the importance of a center for documenting the history of local institutions as the City constantly changes; and

WHEREAS, Temple University Libraries' Special Collections Research Center will celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the founding of the Urban Archives with a daylong symposium, the unveiling of the *History of a City: Celebrating Fifty Years of the Urban Archives* exhibit in Samuel L. Paley Library, and the screening of 'Unedited Philadelphia: Urban Archives at 50", a film featuring news footage stored in the archive; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the founding of the Temple University Urban Archives and honoring the essential role that the Urban Archives have played in preserving a record of Philadelphia's history and culture.

FURTHER RESOLVED, That an Engrossed copy of this resolution be provided to Margery Sly, Director of the Special Collections Research Center at Temple University Libraries.

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