CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

of the

COMMITTEE ON PARKS AND RECREATION

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December 10, 2009 Start: 10:15 am Recess: 10:50 am

HELD AT: Council Chambers

City Hall

B E F O R E:

HELEN D. FOSTER Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Council Member Gale A. Brewer

Council Member Leroy G. Comrie, Jr. Council Member Elizabeth Crowley Council Member Darlene Mealy Council Member Helen Sears

APPEARANCES [CONTINUED]

Theresa Scavo Chairperson Community Board 15

Vivian Singer Daughter Rabbi Joseph I. Singer

James Knight Eldest Brother Janice Knight

Eileen Lumis Swerdlich Aunt Janice Knight

Great-niece of Janice Knight

Darlene Mealy Speaking on Janice Marie Knight New York City Council Member

Sean Crowley Board Member Power Memorial Alumni Association

Andrew Pisani President Power Memorial Alumni Association

Jay Hays Chairman of the Board Manhattan Beach Jewish Center

Gale A. Brewer Speaking on Power Memorial New York City Council Member

1	COMMITTEE ON PARKS AND RECREATION 3
2	[START 1001.MP3]
3	MR. JERRY STAFFIERI: December 10 th ,
4	year 2009, the Committee on Parks and Recreation.
5	Recorded by Jerry Staffieri.
6	[END 1001.MP3]
7	[START 1002.MP3]
8	SERGEANT AT ARMS: Quiet please.
9	CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Good morning.
LO	This is theouch, this is the Committee on Parks
11	and Recreation. We will be hearing Intro 1103
12	which is the Street Co-naming. We have quite a
13	few hearings going on so other members of the
L4	Committee will be coming in. Our first panel will
15	consist of Theresa Scavo and Vivian Singer. If
16	you can please just go to the chair and before you
L7	start your testimony, make sure you say your name
18	and title for the record, thank you.
L9	[Pause]
20	MS. THERESA SCAVO: Good morning
21	members of the New York City Council. I am
22	Theresa Scavo, Chairperson of Community Board 15
23	in Brooklyn. It is an honor to be here today to
24	speak on behalf of a woman who devoted her life to
25	making our community a better place to live, taken

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too early on December 10th, 2008, one year ago today, Sheila Nelson, a wife, a mother, a sister, an educator, a community activist, an animal lover, and a friend to all.

Sheila was a special education teacher, a Dean at Boody [phonetic] Junior High School, a teacher trainer, the Director of the Gifted Program in District 21, and Coordinator of the Sigma Program and the Director of the Family College at Kingsboro. She devoted over 34 years, educating the youth in our community while helping secure our future generations. Sheila was also involved in many organizations such as Hadassah and the National Council of Jewish Women.

Sheila received many awards. She was named Woman of the Year in 2002 by the Highway Democratic Club and in 2003 by the Brighton
Neighborhood Association. Sheila was a dynamo.
She fought for what she believed. She fought for seniors and the infirmed. She also fought a long battle with cancer, beating the odds for six years. As a member of Community Board 15, she was an advocate at all times for the underdog. She was outspoken and worked diligently even when she

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2 was fighting to stay alive.

She was headstrong and determined in all of her efforts. She could move mountains and would always go the extra mile. In October of 2009, Community Board 15 voted unanimously in support of a street rename for this unsung hero of our community. Sheila Nelson, a woman of beauty, warmth and sensitivity. Thank you.

MS. VIVIAN SINGER: Hi. I'm Vivian Singer. I'm the daughter of the late Rabbi Doctor Joseph I. Singer who was the Rabbi in Manhattan Beach Jewish Center from 1947 until his death on March 5th, 2'04. I am most honored and humbled to be here at the same time because it is a great honor that even though my father was very humble and modest, would probably be very--feel very worthy to accept, since he loved his community in Manhattan Beach.

When he came to Manhattan Beach in 1947, the community is a 17-block community on a peninsula. There was a small synagogue, Manhattan Beach Jewish Center, which I believe now is celebrating its 85th or 87th year. After a fire that destroyed the original building in the 50s,

my father spearheaded a drive that resulted in the magnificent center which you're all, I invite you to see and tour as well as our community, a 3-building edifice which houses the most beautiful sanctuary probably in the City as well as the

7 catering hall which services the Tri-State area.

In addition to the synagogue there is a 7-center which houses a Sunday School, a Yeshiva, all the way to a Senior Center, funded by the City, which continues up until today and a day camp and many activities. While my father believed that the Rabbi was a calling, he had given up most of his salary during the building, having been raised in California during the Depression he was sent at the bar mitzvah age, 13, to New York, to Yeshiva Y'ts Coch El Hanon [phonetic] which later became YAU where he obtained his high school, college, his ordination, schema [p] and later he received a Doctor of Divinity from Dropsy College.

Not only was he a Rabbi from

Manhattan Beach but he was interested in the

community. There were friendships of three and

four generations that continued through up until

2 his death and continue with me. Although

3 Manhattan Beach was an affluent area he also was

4 concerned about Brighton Beach where in those

5 years there were not very wealthy or there were

6 marginal financial indigent people living.

early on, the acts of Hassic [p] kindness, he would arrange services for people not taking money, and when someone died and couldn't afford burial he would take his own money as well as raise money. I recently found an IOU from a teacher that borrowed money from him that was not repaid. His acts of kindness which he did quietly go on even now. I was told that a janitor of the synagogue, when he came from Creole speaking, did not know English, and I heard this story last year at his Yertsai [p], my father gave him money and said go enroll in English classes at Kingsboro.

He never took any credit for that.

He was involved in Kingsboro

College where he taught philosophy. He was on the

Board of Menorah Home. He retired at age 79 to

devote the editing of the monumental works of my

maternal grandfather which was a scholarly

2	biblical	work.	My	father	also	was	an	author,	
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3 wonderful orator, which even until today I still

4 miss the way he could get up and just with dignity

5 which he personified deliver a speech.

My father was also concerned about
Manhattan Beach because during the 80s, I believe,
early, it must have been 70s, late 70s or
whatever, early 70s, 'cause when you get older you
forget dates, Mayor Beam came to the house because
my father behind the scenes was concerned about
something going on with the actual beach part of
Manhattan Beach and the area was resolved.

Russians. I was present one night when Bella
Olman came crying with the Oceanfront Council that
they need her son to get out of Russia. My father
placed a call to someone who had been raised in
Manhattan Beach who was legal counsel for Ted
Kennedy, next day, Ted Kennedy's office called my
father and the man was released several months
later. My father never looked for thank yous or
any honors.

When he retired at age 79 unfortunately he ended up going on dialysis and he

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lived about 7 years. He continued to show the
same grace and even when I had to wheel him, he
loved Manhattan Beach. And when the community
Board honored him, when he retired, I remember his
words, I don't have to go anywhere to Florida
because I have everything. He continued to go to
the beach in summer at Kingsboro when he could not
he stopped. And I continued to wheel him to
synagogue and I continued to wheel him on the bay.

He loved everybody in the community. And I, having only been raised in the shore used to ask him who are these people and he'd tell me who they are. It didn't matter whether they were from his shul, whether they were religious, whatever. If someone called on him for a favor, he complied. His workday started at 5:00 o'clock to go to the first minyan [p] the service and ended at 10:00 o'clock.

His work ethic of honesty, not looking for praise, working hard, has carried over to me because I've been at Brookdale since I got my Master's and several years ago the hospital appointed me a senior social worker. He is continued to be missed in the community and I

	2	think	to	name	the	street	in	the	beginning	of
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3 Manhattan Beach where his beloved synagogue stands

4 is a tribute and an honor and I thank you.

CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Thank you

6 very much. Our next panel will be Eileen Limus

7 Swerlich. Thank you. And James Knight.

[Pause]

MR. JAMES KNIGHT: Good morning
Councilmen. Good morning and hello. My name is
James Knight. I'm the eldest brother of Janice
Knight. Janice passed away in December 30th, 2007
due to breast cancer. Janice focused her energy
on making sure that the children of Public 235
received quality education. Janice knew firsthand
what a quality education means because she,
herself, was a student at Public School 235 when
our family moved into the community in the mid1960s.

In New York City, Janice began her career in 1979 as an early childhood educate or Starette City Learning Center. And in 1982 to 1988 she was a teacher for gifted prekindergarten children at PS 235. At the District Office she worked as an early childhood screening coordinator

2 for Community School Board District 18. She

became an Assistant Principal in 1995 and later a

4 Principal of Public School 235 in May, 1999.

My sister was an active member of the Columbia University Writing Project where she served as a facilitator and liaison for her school. She actively pursued opportunities at the district and community level to assure that the young people become well grounded in literacy.

In 2004 she was nominated and received a prestigious Kahn Fellowship for Distinguished New York City Principals. Janice was, excuse me, I feel that the legacy that was defined by my sister for her tenacity, for her excellence to provide opportunities for the students at 235 is an example for the community. And I would like to express my appreciate for those who have supported the renaming of the street sign in front of 235, an honor, and I would like to say it will be a well remembered memory in regards to my sister. Thank you.

MS. EILEEN LIMUS SWERDLICH: Good morning Council Members, audience. My name is Eileen Limus Swerdlich [p]. I am a product of New

community.

York City school systems. I currently reside in

Stamford, Connecticut and I have just retired as

the Assistant Superintendent of the Stamford

Public Schools. I'm here in support of our entire

My deceased niece, my nephew who

I'm so proud of and my niece who has—my great—
niece who has joined us today to make an appeal, a
reasonable appeal, to honor the work and the
legacy of my niece, Janice Marie Knight. She
unremittingly worked for what we all seek in this
nation now, equity for all of our children,
resiliency for all of our children, so that this
nation may remain strong and heal through
education in some of the says we have recently
been hurt and in some ways bleeding.

Janice Knight as I know her was my mentee. And so it is a very personal thing for me to come today to share some of the inner workings of this very diligent focused individual. My nephew, others in the community, can go on and on and I think you have on record the awards she's received, the recognition she has received.

And I guess the best that I can do

2 today is fill in some of the flesh of that work.

And to share a little bit about the work of her living and the courage of her dying.

Janice Knight died on December 30th, 2007. Her last day at work was just before the normal Thanksgiving break. Her dedication and stamina and vision carried her through until the very end. She was there, present, through all of her chemotherapy, through every day, she did not miss school.

She went for her health session and the next day was back in school. Why? The family asked why. Because the children must succeed, was always her answer. Her way of being, I guess, can best be expressed by a poem that I have always kept close to my heart and my work by Guillermo Appolinaire [p]. And it simply says go to the edge, he said. They said, we are afraid. Go to the edge. They said but we are afraid. Go to the edge. They went to the edge. He pushed them and they flew.

The poem embodies the way she made children and parents go to the edge to become a unified community of learning. And the product of

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2 that urging and pushing is now in doctors,

3 lawyers, journalists, family people who are

4 productive, health care workers who Janice, in

5 creating a community of learning, has enabled

6 people to stand and be productive citizens.

I can honestly say it's humbling for me to be here today to be a part of the democratic process. I feel so proud. And I want to say that whatever your decision, whether you decide to name this street or rename it, Janice M. Knight, or whether you decide to rename it something else, may I suggest that in honor of her and her work, if it's not her name, let it be Literacy Way, Literacy Way, as way of remembering the fight that we still have in this country to pay down the debt of equity and to hold up people who gave all of themselves to increase opportunity for young people, for families, for our nation, when we think globally. I thank you for the opportunity to speak and I also thank you for the service that you give to the City.

CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Thank you very much. We've been joined by Council Member Comrie and Council Member Mealy from Brooklyn.

2 Would you like to say something?

thank you Chair and good morning everyone. And I want to--I would love to say thank you for being here, the family. I asked them to come 'cause this is important. Our youth in that community need to see that literacy is something that Ms.

Knight was I mean adamant about. I read so many things about her and I said wow.

That's what we need in our community. We need people who care. People through it all, she was sick and she still did.

And that's where you say it takes a village to raise a child, she did that. And she exemplifies what it's about to be an educator.

And I just want to thank the family for being here and I hope this Committee will honor her and our community to rename this street, Janice Marie Knight. I would love way, but, it's street. So I hope that this Committee can do that at their convenience on this day or another day. And I want to thank the family for coming. You didn't have to. We could have voted on it and went on.

2	But you knew it was important to be
3	here to let people know who she was and what she
4	stood for and what she lived for. That's the main
5	thing. She lived for youth, to educate, to help,
6	to mold a community.
7	And she did that as a principal and

I know Marty Markowitz our Borough President he made sure that I say that, to let you know, that he wants this name, this street renamed just as well. And his office is doing everything they could to hope that this can be a reality, that the family would know that we appreciate her. And thank you Chair.

CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Thank you.

Just the process, we're not voting it out today so it's only testimony. But thank you very much for showing up.

MS. SWERDLICH: All right. Thank you Ms. Foster.

CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Our next panel is Andrew Pisani, did I say that closely right? And Sean Crowley.

[Pause]

MR. SEAN CROWLEY: Thank you Madam

1	COMMITTEE ON PARKS AND RECREATION 17
2	Chair. I just wanted to first start off by
3	thanking Gale Brewer and her staff and all the
4	work that they've done in supporting our proposal
5	to have West 61 st Street
6	CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: (Interposing)
7	I'm sorry, I know who you are Sean but we need you
8	to introduce yourself
9	MR. CROWLEY: (Interposing) Oh I'm
10	sorry.
11	CHAIRPERSON FOSTER:for the
12	record.
13	MR. CROWLEY: Sean Crowley, Forrest
14	Hills, New York. And I'm with Chick Pisani, we're
15	on theChick is the President, I'll let him
16	introduce himself.
17	CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Yep.
18	MR. CROWLEY: But we're on the

Board of the Power Memorial Alumni Association, having been graduates of that fine institution that was closed for some time now and like I said, Gale, Councilwoman Brewer and her staff did a tremendous job in supporting us as did the Community Board in realizing that the legacy of Power Memorial is something that needs to be

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2	recognized by theis worthy of recognition by t	the
3	City of New York in this street naming change.	

4 With that I'll give it over to Chick.

MR. ANDREW PISANI: Good morning.

My name is Andrew Pisani, and I live in Union

City, correction, I'm a Police Sergeant in Union

City, New Jersey. And I commuted to New York City

every day for high school and into college and

attended Power Memorial. And the history of our

school is very well engrained in the history of

Hell's Kitchen on 61st Street.

The school started in 1931, moved to the location on 61st Street in 1938.

Unfortunately the school closed in 1985. And throughout those years the school produced a tremendous amount of viable, contributing citizens throughout the City of New York and now throughout the country. We have alumni who live as far as London at this point. We're all over the world basically.

Many famous celebrities have gone
to Power Memorial such as Kareem Abdul Jabbar,
Lenny Elmore, the actor Bruno Kirby. And we would
like our legacy to really live on because our

philosophy was that we've taken something wonderful from Power, from that education, and our philosophy is to give back.

And what we have now instituted are two scholarship programs to the Irish Christian Brothers Schools, one is at Rice and one is at Wall Hollows. We are also in the process of starting a third scholarship program and we want to continue into a fourth and fifth, as many as we can to show our appreciation to pay back to the City of New York and, you know, to the Irish Christian Brothers community.

And the philosophy was that you entered Power as a 14-year old boy, a freshman.

You graduated a responsible 17 or 18-year old man.

And went on to do things and to always look forward to giving back and to helping others. And basically that's still our philosophy today. And our alumni association now is about 2,000 strong.

And we meet three times a year in the City at various events that we have all throughout the year. And we feel that naming 61st Street and Amsterdam Avenue, that little dead-end street where we walked hundreds and hundreds of

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times would be a wonderful tribute to our school,

to our alma mater, and not only that but we found

that a lot of our alumni when they come into the

City, it's like a magnet.

We always go up that street. I know every time I come into the City I always show someone, this is where I went to school, right here on this corner. And if we were to see that name on the street, I'm sure it would be more of an incentive for our alumni to contribute more into our scholarship fund which would then, you know, help the worthy kids of New York. Thank you.

MR. BREWER: So in spite of the fact that we've been closed since 1985 we maintain a very active alumni association, giving back, as Chicky said, to students at Rice High School and All Hallows High School and others. We plan to. We have been very involved in the St. Patrick's Day Parade representing about close to 200 folks, wining awards as one of the top marchers in the parade.

We take pride in that because we take pride in our power, what Power stood for.

It's very important I think that the Power story

be told because it was a place where you came from

anywhere in the City and where diversity was

nourished and appreciated and the spirit of

brotherhood is something that unfortunately was

lost with that. But we keep it going in the

alumni association.

And we have a great group of fine men. And one of them, notably, other than my brother who did go there, Congressman Joe Crowley, is the former speaker of the City Council, Peter Vallone went to Power. So we like to know that our men were active in the religious life and the political life and the athletic life and the entertainment field.

And they are the backbone of many of our institutions, predominantly the Police Department, Fire Department. Those names of people who go on and maintain and keep our City as strong as it is. So I thank you for having us and appreciate it. We support this legislation and.

CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Thank you very much. Thank you for taking the time out to come testify. Our last panelist is Jay Hays; I

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2 | think that is supposed to be. Is it?

MR. JAY HAYS: That's correct.

CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Okay. Please just come to the mic, introduce yourself for the record and then you can start your testimony.

MR. HAYS: My name is Jay Hays; I'm the Chairman of the Board of the Manhattan Beach Jewish Center. It's a synagogue where Rabbi Doctor Joseph I. Singer was the Rabbi for a period of 50 years. First of all I want to thank the Community Board number 15, especially Theresa Scavo for supporting this application and also the community group of Manhattan Beach, led by Iris Salterman [p] and of course City Councilman Michael Nelson.

Rabbi Singer was a member of the facility of Yeshiva University and Stern College, earned both his ordination as a Rabbi and a PhD in Philosophy and History. He not only was a theoretical scholar but he was a man who possessed a genuine understanding of the social climate and religious needs of his contemporary generation. However he sacrificed his academic career to devote his full time to nurturing his community of

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2 Manhattan Beach in the southernmost part of 3 Brooklyn.

He knew each member of his congregation and he knew their capabilities and what they could contribute to the synagogue. Some were more religious than others however he would nurture all facets of his members' personality and see how he could make a positive contribution to the synagogue. Of course one of Rabbi Singer's significant achievements was leading the congregation in the campaign to build a beautiful sanctuary and not only that but a contiguous community center building. Because Rabbi Singer felt that a synagogue is not only a place for prayer but also should be the center of social, education and cultural life of the community itself.

Amongst the things that Rabbi
Singer had achieved, quickly, was that the
Manhattan Beach Jewish Center had a summer camp of
over 700 children, had a young couples club. It
was an active and broad-based sisterhood. It had
a health club in conjunction with a gymnasium for
the community; had a fund-raising bazaar, had a

2 school for disabled children as well as a Yeshiva.

Just to give you an idea of his dedication during the last few years of his life, he was on dialysis for three times a week; nevertheless Friday night he would give his special lesson. And I would come home on a Friday night after a full week of work and I was exhausted. I'd say I don't know, I don't think I can make it tonight. And then I would picture Rabbi Singer, 85 years old, again on dialysis 3 times a week, I said if he can do it, I can do it. And up until the last weeks of his life he gave

that Friday night lecture.

Manhattan Beach community itself was greatly enriched by his career. And although as a religious corporation we didn't get involved in politics, the Mayors at that time, including Abraham Beam would make his, would you say, a customary stop at the Manhattan Beach Jewish Center to see Rabbi Singer. And I just want to mention that his wife, rather his--well his wife, Rebecca, who was his lifetime partner, unfortunately prematurely died in the early 1980s.

2	She was his lifetime partner. And the slack was
3	taken up by his daughter Vivian who until the end
4	was an extremely devoted daughter and would wheel
5	Rabbi Singer to his class on those Friday nights

6 that I mentioned. Thank you very much.

CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Thank you.

We've been joined by Council Member Brewer. Yeah.

But you have time to say something. Of course.

just here. I'm Gale Brewer, representing the West Side of Manhattan. And one of the ways that is being considered today thanks to the Chair and others is Power Memorial. I'm sure you've heard from some of their wonderful graduates. It's a place that has many, many memories for people. And the fact of the matter is it is a place where athletics and academics was always in tandem. And I am really excited to know that the many, many graduates who are—have fond memories of their school.

We've gotten hundreds of emails from as far away as Hong Kong this morning, graduates who feel sad they can't be here but to say that they will go back to this location and

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remember the great academic and athletic education they had at Power Memorial. So I'm delighted it went through the Community Board 7. Nobody could believe that it actually happened. And now we're delighted to have it go through the City Council. Thank you very much.

CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Thank you.

And when Sean Crowley spoke, they thanked—he thanked you for your efforts. And I want to thank everyone for coming out today and sharing with this Committee and eventually the City the legacy of a sister and a niece and a father and a Rabbi and a community activist and a wife and of course an institution.

Once it is voted out of Committee, it is the type of thing that once we vote on it, others that, you know, didn't even know Power Memorial was once there or didn't know the Rabbi or Mrs. Nelson or Ms. Knight, will be able to look up at a sign. So thank you very much for taking the time out. And it will be voted out of Committee not at this meeting. So thank you. There being no more testimony this meeting is adjourned.

1	COMMITTEE ON PARKS AND RECREATION 27
2	[Gavel banging]
3	[END 1002.MP3]
4	[START 1003.MP3]
5	[Background noise]
6	COUNCIL MEMBER SEARS: Helen Sears,
7	present.
8	CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Do I have to
9	say reopen the meeting? You don't have to say
10	[Pause]
11	CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: You don't
12	hear it. Okay. Sorry. Better.
13	COUNCIL MEMBER SEARS: Oh okay.
14	Fine. Okay. Okay.
15	CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Oh wait
16	COUNCIL MEMBER SEARS:
17	(Interposing) Are we reopening it or just
18	Okay Helen Sears, here.
19	COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: Elizabeth
20	Crowley, here.
21	CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Now I'll
22	close the meeting on Parks and Recreation.
23	[Gavel banging]
24	[END 1003.MP3]
25	

I, Laura L. Springate certify that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. I further certify that I am not related to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that I am in no way interested in the outcome of this matter.

Laura L. Springate

Signature ____Laura L. Springate_____

Date _____December 16, 2009_