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Res. No. 299

Resolution commemorating the life and mourning the death of Jane Jacobs.

By Council Members Recchia Jr., James, Brewer, Lappin, Mendez, White Jr. and Liu

Whereas, Jane Jacobs, the visionary urban theorist who forever changed the way Americans perceive the urban environment, died on April 26, 2006, at age 89; and

Whereas, This remarkable intellectual's ten books documenting the condition and economy of American cities have had a profound impact on the development of not only New York City, but also of countless other American cities; and

Whereas, Jane Jacobs, born Jane Butzner on May 4, 1916, in Scranton, Pennsylvania, moved to New York City in 1934 in hopes of pursuing a career in journalism; and

Whereas, After arriving in New York City, Jane Jacobs held a variety of jobs, working primarily as a freelance writer and editor, as well as attending Columbia University's School of General Studies; and

Whereas, In 1952, Jane Jacobs was appointed editor of Architectural Forum, where she witnessed the

emergence of a powerful new doctrine of urban planning which called for the demolition of older neighborhoods in favor of large high rise housing developments surrounded by open space and removed from existing street grids; and

Whereas, Jane Jacobs became increasingly critical of the prevailing urban planning doctrines of post-war America as she observed the intricate street life of her own Greenwich Village block, as well as in New York City's many other communities, and recognized the absence of such urban vitality in new developments rising throughout the City; and

Whereas, In 1958, the renowned sociologist and urban planner William Whyte invited Jane Jacobs to write an article on downtown development for Fortune magazine, which lead to a Rockefeller Foundation grant to write a book about American cities; and

Whereas, In 1961, Jane Jacobs published her landmark book, "The Death and Life of Great American Cities," which is considered by many to be one of the most important works in the history of American urban planning; and

Whereas, Jane Jacobs' book advocated for ethnically and economically diverse neighborhoods with active street life, mixed used developments and high population densities, and stressed the importance of community input in the planning process; and

Whereas, These simple ideas represented a revolutionary change in urban planning theories and boldly challenged the orthodoxy of modernist urban planning that was championed at the time by such famous and influential critics and architects as Lewis Mumford and Le Corbusier; and

Whereas, In 1962, Jane Jacobs applied her ideas to her own community when she became the chairwoman of the Joint Committee to Stop the Lower Manhattan Expressway, a community organization formed to prevent the building of the proposed Lower Manhattan Expressway, which had been recommended by Robert Moses, the City's most powerful development official at the time and which, if built, would have displaced 1,972 families and destroyed most of modern day SoHo and Little Italy; and

Whereas, Jane Jacobs succeeded in convincing the New York City Board of Estimate to reject the necessary appropriation for the roadway in 1962, a decision which many historians consider to be a significant turning point in the career of Robert Moses; and

Whereas, Jane Jacobs' victory over Robert Moses' highway plans signaled the beginning of significant community input into urban planning in New York City and lead other civic leaders in the City to question proposed "slum clearance" and highway projects that may have done irreparable damage to the City's neighborhoods; and

Whereas, In 1969, Jane Jacobs moved with her family to Toronto, Canada, and continued to write about the future of cities in the United States and Canada; and

Whereas, Jane Jacobs went on to publish nine more books, including her most recent publication, "Dark Age Ahead," published in 2004; and

Whereas, Jane Jacobs continued to speak out on major planning and development issues in the United States and Canada, including offering recent criticism of the proposed New York Sports and Convention Center; and

Whereas, Jane Jacobs' writings have had a profound influence on the American city and on the way that Americans relate to their cities; and

Whereas, That influence can be felt strongly in New York City, where countless planning decisions have been affected by the resonance of Jane Jacobs' powerful vision of a healthy city; now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the Council of the City of New York commemorates the life and mourns the death of Jane Jacobs.

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